

JOSEPH DENNIE--DEFENDER OF LITERARY EXCELLENCE

by

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## CHRONOLOGY OF JOSEPH DENNIE'S LIFE

- 30 August, 1768: Born, Joseph Dennie, first and only child of Joseph, Sr. and Mary (Green) Dennie in Boston, Massachusetts.
- 4 September, 1768: Baptised at Brattle Square Church in Boston.
- April, 1775: Dennies moved to Lexington.
- 1783: Joseph was sent to a commercial school in Boston to learn the book-keeping trade.
- 1784: Joseph became a clerk in Major James Swan's counting house in Boston.
- 1785: Placed in charge of Reverend Samuel West, of Needham, Massachusetts, to prepare for entrance into Harvard.
- Spring, 1788: Left Harvard because of ill health and spent six weeks with Rev. West before returning for the next term in August.
- Spring, 1789: Again left Harvard because of ill health and retired to Lexington.
- September, 1789: Returned to Harvard.
- 8 October, 1789: Degraded ten places in class for disrespect to tutor.
- 21 December, 1789: Suspended for six months for second act of disrespect to tutor.
- February, 1789: Wrote Panegyric on Thomson, which appeared in the Massachusetts Magazine.
- 21 January, 1790: Went to Groton, where he was placed under the care of Rev. Mr. Chaplin to pursue his studies.
- 8 July, 1790: Reinstated in his class at Harvard.
- July, 1790: Left Harvard for Lexington, after graduation.
- December, 1790: Left Lexington for Charlestown, New Hampshire, to study law with Benjamin West.
- 8 December, 1790: Arrived in Charleston.
- February, 1791: Visit to Lexington.
- Summer, 1791: Trip to Enfield, Hartford, and New Haven as the escort to Mrs. Tryphena Olcott and her niece.
- 13 July-4 September, 1791: Visit in Lexington.

- 14 February, 1792: First number of Farrago essays appeared in the Morning Ray, Windsor, Vermont, published by Judah P. Spooner and J. Reed Hutchins. Other essays appeared: 21 February, 6 March, 20 March; others probably published between 20 March and 19 August, 1793.
- December-March, 1793: Became a lay reader in the Episcopal Church in Claremont.
- December, 1793: Thres year law clerkship ended.
- 19 August, 1793: Farrago no. VIII appeared in the Eagle; or Dartmouth Centinel, published by Josiah Dunham at Hanover, New Hampshire. Fifteen essays by Dennie appeared hereafter.
- March, 1794: Admitted to the New Hampshire Bar and opened a law office in Charlestown.
- 18 September, 1794: Last Farrago essay in the Eagle appeared.
- 1794: Dennie and Royall Tyler formed a literary partnership: The Shen of Colon and Spondee. Contributed to the Eagle until March, 1795.
- 23 February, 1795: Announcement in Thomas (Robert Treat) Pains's Federal Orrery of Dennie's and Tyler's proposed move to Boston and forthcoming Colon and Spondee essays in the Orrery.
- 13 April, 1795: Dennis's last direct contribution to the Orrery.
- 18 May, 1795: Announcement in the Orrery of the forthcoming Tablet, a small literary miscellany edited by Dennis, published by William Spotswood of Boston.
- 18 May, 1795: The Tablet made its first appearance.
- July, 1795: Returned to Charlestown.
- August, 1795: Learned that the Tablet had failed after the thirteenth number (11 August).
- September or October, 1795: Dennie moved his law office from Charlestown to Walpole, New Hampshire.
- 12 October, 1795: The first essay, "Wine and New Wine," of the Lay Preacher series appeared in David Carlisle's New Hampshire Journal: or Farmer's Weekly Museum. Series ended 24 May, 1796.
- Late October, 1795: Dennis became co-editor of the Museum.
- 8 December, 1795: Announcement of the forthcoming publication of the Farrago essays published in the Museum.

- April, 1796: Dennie became editor of the Museum, and combined this position with his law occupation.
- August, 1796: Carlisle issued a small volume of Dennie's entitled The Lay Preacher, or Short Sermons for Idle Readers.
- February, 1797: Dennie announced in the Museum that the Tablet essays would resume.
- December, 1797: A series of paragraph criticisms by Colon and Spondee appeared in the Museum.
- June, 1798: After a year's absence, the Lay Preacher essays returned. These appeared in the Museum regularly until 17 September, and thereafter until 29 August, 1799.
- 27 August, 1798: Dennie ran and was defeated in the Walpole elections for State Representative to Congress.
- February, 1799: Colon and Spondee contributed two series to the Museum: Political Applications, and An Author's Evenings.
- 26 May, 1799: Dennie appointed private secretary to Timothy Pickering, Secretary of State.
- September, 1799: Relinquished his connection with the Museum and went to Philadelphia.
- 15 October, 1799: First of the Lecturer series, "Slander," signed "Orlando" appeared in The Guardian: or New Brunswick Advertiser, a Federalist newspaper, edited by Abraham Blauvelt. Dennie probably contributed three more essays after this.
- October, 1799: Dennie started contributing political articles and Lay Preacher essays to John Fenno's Gazette of the United States.
- 26 December, 1799: Proposal for The Gazette of the United States, edited by Oliver Oldschool, Esq., a revised form of the Gazette. This was not done.
- 26 December, 1799: The Gazette announced that a Lay Preacher's Magazine was planned. This was not carried out.
- 29 March, 1800: The Gazette announced Dennie's intention to write a "Liberal" Translation of the works of Sallust, the Roman historian to be published in London. This project also failed.
- 30 April, 1800: The Gazette announced proposals for a two volume work by Dennie: "An Original American Work," The Lay Preacher. This project failed.
- 27 May, 1800: The Gazette announced the proposal of the publication of The Farrago, or Essays Gay and Grave, by Dennie. This proposal was not worked out.



- May, 1800: Pickering removed from office, and Dennie, though invited to retain his position, left.
- 21 June, 1800: The Gazette announced Dennie's editorship of the "Literary and Miscellaneous" Department.
- 16 October, 1800: The Gazette announced a new magazine, The Port Folio, to be edited by Dennie and Asbury Dickins.
- 3 January, 1801: The first issue of The Port Folio appeared.
- 25 April, 1801: A second edition of The Port Folio was announced in The Gazette.
- 1801: The Spirit of the Farmer's Museum and Lay Preacher's Gazette was issued at Walpole.
- 16 January, 1802: Dennie became sole editor of The Port Folio.
- 4 July, 1803: Dennie was tried for seditious and inflammatory libel against the government, but was found not guilty in the trial of 23 November, 1805.
- 11 February, 1804: The Port Folio contained Dennie's prospectus for his proposed edition of Shakespeare. The complete edition was never finished.
- 12 December, 1807: A new series of the Lay Preacher essays appeared in the Port Folio. This series continued until 13 February, 1808.
- January, 1812: Dennie announced his resignation as editor of the Port Folio and the probable new editor, Nicholas Biddle.
- 7 January, 1812: Dennie died in Philadelphia at the age of forty-five. He was buried in St. Peter's churchyard in Philadelphia.
- 1827: Dennie's Port Folio, which had existed twenty-six years, was abandoned.

## INTRODUCTION

Joseph Dennie had two goals in life. He wanted to become a "great man"<sup>1</sup> before he was twenty-five years old, and he wanted to destroy American mediocrity in and complacency toward literature. Although Dennie did not achieve his first goal by his twenty-fifth birthday, he did, in a sense, later become a great man, as he, through his relentless and often libelous criticism of the American public and American writers and their works, helped pave the way for the flowering of New England, and helped stimulate an appreciative and industrious literary atmosphere for such American greats as Irving, Bryant, Emerson, and Hawthorne.

Here was a man who lived by standards--standards so high that even he could not comply with them all the time. His standard of excellence in literature was based upon the English 18th century style of Addison, Sterne, and Goldsmith. To him, these men were examples of the finest in the classical and established forms of literature. Of Addison and Goldsmith, he said when he was on the threshold of his literary career as author of the Farrago essays:

In moments of dreary vacancy, I have amused myself & enlarged my knowledge of the English style, by writing at different times & in various vehicles the Farrago. . . In the press of Obscurity, I knew that I should risque (sic) nothing either in censure or praise. The Public, however saw or fancied some merit;-- and as American essays have been hitherto unmarked except for flimsy expression & jejune ideas, they have allowed me the praise of reviving in some degree the Goldsmith vivacity in thought & the Addisonian sweetness in expression.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to parents, Charleston, 7 August, 1793, as quoted from Laura Green Pedder (ed), "The Letters of Joseph Dennie," The Maine Bulletin. University Press: University of Maine Studies, XXXVIII (January, 1936), p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to parents, Charleston, January, 1794. Ibid., pp. 138-139.

Another literary venture, The Tablet, shows quite clearly Dennie's endeavor to base his own writings on these men--particularly Sterne: "It (The Tablet) will appear, elegantly. . . something in the manner of Sterne's. . ."<sup>1</sup> The Lay Preacher essays also continued to show Dennie's bases for literary excellence, as they were drawn upon the design of Addison's Spectator essays, the playful levity of Oliver Goldsmith, and Sterne's "Sermons of Yorick."

In criticizing the American public for their complacency in accepting mediocre literature, Dennie believed that America had become vain in her newly won independent state, and that in trying to destroy as much of the existing English flavor as she could, had, in her national zeal, substituted in literature the untried and deficient writings of her sons for that of the established and elegant works of Europe--especially England. Dennie expressed this view over and over. Probably his most quoted criticism of American literature is that one found in The Farmers' Museum:

Every man, unless tumid with the most ridiculous pride and confidence in American genius and literature must be sensible from the newness of our country, from the deficiencies of our seminaries, from the comparative paucity of books, and from the almost total want of patronage, that many literary articles can be furnished in perfection, only from Europe. . . The silly vanity of a self-complacent America may be wounded at this blunt, but notorious truth. Let him deny it if he can.<sup>2</sup>

A partial justification for such censure can be seen in the following paragraph from the Gazette of the U.S., 29 April, 1800: the account is of the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to mother and Harriot Green, Walpole, New Hampshire, September 6, 1799. Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Dennie and Asbury Dickens (eds.), New Hampshire Journal, or Farmer's Weekly Museum. 18 February, 1799, as quoted from H. M. Ellis, "Joseph Dennie and His Circle," Bulletin of the University of Texas. Austin, Texas: University of Texas, July 15, 1915, p. 100. Ellis' book will be hereafter referred to as Dennie.



launching of the frigate President at New York.

Yesterday morning, at 10 o'clock precisely, the Daughter of the Forest and the Heir of the Ocean, embroasd, in peerless Majesty, her destined slement. The order, beauty, and godlike simplicity of the scene, the pen of man cannot depict. The beholders alone can know the mingled sensations of Pleasure, of Joy, and of National Glory, that the scene excited. The harbor on both sides for some distance was thronged with vessels whose decks were covered with admiring beholders. The neighboring hills, house-tops, and even the shores of Long Island were crowded with spectators whose acclamations echoed the Glory of America. Several Artillery and Volunteer Companies, according to the arrangements of General Hughes, paraded near the shore, and after she entered the water, closed the scene with a feu-de-joie. On the whole, we think it the most noble scene ever exhibited on this side of the Atlantic. Her construction, timber, and workmanship reflect much honor upon her builders, and great merit is due to the judgement of Mr. Cheeseman, under whose direction she moved with the most perfect ease and harmony, and with a noble Bow, bade the Land ADIEU.<sup>1</sup>

To this much too florid, euphuistic, and stilted account, Dennis published a clever, mock-serious criticism, line by line, and concluded with the following paragraph, which shows his method of criticism in that he approaches a subject directly, sensibly, and determinedly. It also shows four of his main tenets of criticism--refinement, simplicity, expressiveness, and desire for English models.

After having, at some length, in a style of burlesque and banter, thus analysed this curious paragraph, it may seem impertinent to close the subject gravely. But the subject is of importance, and deserves the sober consideration of all, who aspire to write and converse with purity and simplicity. This paragraph was not selected for the purpose of exclusive animadversion. We have no particular spleen against this individual composition. It was picked up from a similar mass of writings in America, as a type of a very common, current and utterly vicious style, at once the fashion and disgrace of the family. Criticism is useful, and shall speak, though her voice 'grate harsh thunder' to the ear of the true patriots, bombastic editors, fustian orators, college boys and id genus omne. Our reproach and ridicule are intended to reform. America has indulged this rant too much. It is time it should be ridiculed and reasmod away. We must choose this day whom we will serve. We have the 'Moses and the Prophets' of language.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis, Dennis, p. 127.

We have Dean Swift, Dr. Robertson and Sir William Jones. We have too the miserable remnants of Cromwell's Puritanism, the Babylonish dialect of 'forefathers at Plymouth,' the red lattice phrases of acquitted felons, and the 'hissing hot' speeches from many a town meeting. Of these deformities let us be ashamed, and strive to emulate a diction pure, simple, expressive and English.<sup>1</sup>

At times, Dennie defended his literary ideas so vehemently that many of his contemporaries thought him a grave hindrance to the establishment of good American literature, rather than a help. In reaction to such harsh criticisms as "the Editor of the Sun<sup>2</sup> is a blockhead, and an ass and a True American.<sup>3</sup> I would have the sapient animal thrown at once into the Poultry Compter for his better information,"<sup>4</sup> the Columbia Centinel published this retort.

On the whole, I am convinced, that if our country be . . . deficient in literary taste and patronage, the time is not far distant when she will be more correct, even should you abate something of your zeal and perseverance. Sarcasm will never convert dullness into ingenuity, nor will genius be bullied into existence.<sup>5</sup>

It is his criticisms of Wordsworth, Barlow, Dwight, Radcliffe, Noah Webster, and Franklin, however, which most reveal Dennie's principal literary standards: originality, simplicity, a well-developed and unified theme, eloquence and refinement, correct grammar, inspiring images, and English 18th century style based upon Addison, Sterne, and Goldsmith. These criticisms appear in his editions of the Port Folio--one of the most successful and influential papers of 18th century United States.

As important as the criticisms themselves, however, is Dennie, the man, for only through his biography can his ideas of literary excellence and the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 127-8.

<sup>2</sup> New York Sun.

<sup>3</sup> A name adopted by one faction of the Democratic Republicans.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Dennie (ed.), Gazette of the United States, 27 November, 1799. Ellis, Dennie, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup> Columbia Centinel, Boston, 19 October, 1799. Ibid., p. 126.

reasons for the defense of these ideas be examined. His family background; education; occupations as lawyer, lay reader, political aspirant, writer, critic, and editor; his political views and personal character all contributed to the development of a man who could rightfully criticize 18th century American literature, and a man, who in doing so, could help shape a nation's awareness of good literature. The following work, then, is intended to be primarily a biography of Joseph Dennie. However, I have attempted to approach his life in a different manner from his other two<sup>1</sup> biographers in that I have sought to study it from the standpoint of examining the influence which made him the type of man who demanded literary excellence and who continuously and earnestly defended his standards of excellence. I have also sought to discover what his standards were, and how he applied them to his criticisms.

I have divided his life into three periods. The first period directs attention to his family's genealogy, their status in the Boston and Lexington communities, the influences he received from the events of the Revolutionary War, and his early formal schooling, home schooling, and education at Harvard University. From this period, Dennie's social standards of wanting the most prominent citizens as his friends and acquaintances, and the best in clothing and environment were conceived. His political views also had their beginnings here, as did his ideas concerning education, particularly classical and 18th century English literature. He also gained here his chief traits of integrity, independence, and industry. The second period deals with his professions. From his lay reading, he formed one basis for his Lay Preacher essays; from

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<sup>1</sup> I have considered the only two complete works within themselves as true biographies. These are Milton Elliot's Joseph Dennie and His Circle, and W. W. Clapp's Joseph Dennie. Other works include only a chapter or less about Dennie, and do not discuss his entire life.

the study of law and its practice, he was able to pursue his education, meet many influential persons, strengthen his political views, and employ his three prominent characteristics. As a literary man, he gained knowledge and experience in writing, editing and criticism. The third period is the climactic period as it is during this time that all his past influences and experiences are fused together in such a way as to shape Dennie as a defender of literary excellence. It is in this period that Dennie strove the hardest to raise the literary standards in America, and it denotes him as one of the chief 18th century American critics of American literature and the American reading public.

Although Dennie wrote prodigiously, editions of his works are quite scarce. The only complete edition available<sup>1</sup> is The Farmers' Museum and Lay Preacher's Gazette. The Scholar's Facsimile Reprints' edition of John E. Hall's and Milton Ellis' collections of Dennie's Lay Preacher essays, and the University of Texas' edition of Laura Green Pedder's Letters of Joseph Dennie are the only other available sources for his writing. They are well-prepared and annotated--particularly the latter--but incomplete in content. With this in mind, I have included as many examples of Dennie's writing as possible that pertain to my specific purpose. In doing so, I hoped to assemble in one place more of his works than any of his other biographers have, thus facilitating a greater knowledge of Dennie's style, ideas, and criticisms.

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<sup>1</sup> Milton Ellis' edition of Dennie's Lay Preacher may be obtained from Harvard University, as may John E. Hall's edition of the Lay Preacher. However, neither are complete.



## THE FIRST PERIOD

## Family Background

Born 30 August, 1768, Joseph Dennie was to be the first and only child of Joseph, Sr., and Mary Green Dennie. The Dennies, at that time, belonged to that merchant aristocracy which had become dominant after the turn of the century. Joseph, Sr., a respected and prosperous merchant in Boston at the early age of twenty-five, could proudly claim many of his ancestors and near relations as successful. His great-grandfather, Albert Dennie (?-1707-8?) came from Scotland in 1684, married the Reverend Samuel Wakeman's daughter, Sarah, and settled in Fairfield, Connecticut. His son, John (1694-1747) was the founder of the family in Boston, where he married Reverend Joseph Webb's daughter, Sarah, who could claim descent from Robert the Bruce. They had five sons: Albert, John, William, Thomas, and Joseph. Albert married Abigail Coleman, who had a local reputation as a poetress, and whose father was Reverend Benjamin Coleman of the Brattle Square Church in Boston. John was a prominent Tory who could claim many friends among men of wealth and rank. All were prominent merchants, with the exception of William, whose interests lay in colonial politics.

Mary Green Dennie's family, the Greens of Cambridge and Boston, were "probably the most remarkable family in the annals of American printing."<sup>1</sup> Samuel, her great-grandfather, is known as the second printer in America<sup>2</sup> and purportedly printed ninety-five books among which were included the Bay Psalm Book (1640) and The Sovereignty & Goodness of God Together, . . .: Being a

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> The first was Stephen Daye.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah Green, History of Printing. 1:252-263, as stated by Ellis, op. cit., p. 14.



Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (1682).

His eldest son, Samuel, Jr., became a printer in Boston; his second son was a printer in Connecticut where his two sons, three grandsons, among whom was Timothy who established the first newspaper in Vermont, and his seven great-grandsons all became printers at one time or another. Samuel's third son, Bartholomew, became the printer of the first newspaper in the United States--The Boston News-Herald. Bartholomew is also noted for the moral lessons he attached to his news articles in the News-Herald. Mary's brother, John, the son of Bartholomew, Jr., who was a printer with his father on the News-Herald, was a prominent printer in Boston, and printed the laws of the Massachusetts Colony, and the Boston Weekly Advertiser--then the leading paper in Boston. As were the Dennies, the Greens were people of property and community respect, "who enjoyed an excellent reputation for uprightness and for honesty in business."<sup>1</sup>

Both were staunch Loyalists and pious families. Thus, even before Dennie's birth, the pattern of his life seemed to be laid out, as his ancestors were successful admixtures of the literary, political, religious, and business worlds. Born into such established families, Dennie could look forward to probable respect and some wealth, and a tradition of gracious living which had been enjoyed through the centuries.

#### The Revolution

Shortly after Dennie's birth, events took place which would alter and influence his life. In the year, 1769, John Hancock's sloop, Liberty, was seized in the Newport harbor by the British frigate, Romney, for carrying on

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis, Dennie, p. 18.

illegal trade as defined in the Navigation Acts. When he was two, the infamous Boston Massacre took place, as an indirect result of the 1769 event; when he was five, the Boston Tea Party occurred. From this time on, resentment against the British sympathizers ran high, and the Dennises looked at their pro-colonist neighbors with disdain. Dennie was seven when the first major armed clash between the "Red-coats" and the colonists happened, and probably saw some of the wounded brought across the plain from Charlestown that evening in 1775. Scenes like this, family sentiment, and events at this time must have made a deep impression upon his young mind, and probably molded many of his later anti-colonial political views. Shortly after the Lexington battle, the siege of Boston began, and accordingly, a town meeting was held in which it was agreed that all inhabitants would leave their arms in a designated place for the defense of the town. It was also announced that those inclined to do so could leave Boston, with their family and effects. On 24 April, 1775, Joseph, Sr. gave over one brace of pocket pistols to the selectmen.<sup>1</sup> Probably soon after, he left with his family for the neighboring village of Lexington.

In Lexington, the Dennises held themselves aloof from their neighbors for several reasons: 1) Lexington, between 1775-1778 was an agricultural center, whose citizens did not enjoy the same urban type interests that the Dennises did; 2) Lexington was an intensely patriotic town--the Dennises, as mentioned before, were strong supporters of the Loyalist group; and 3) Joseph, Sr., became ill. He had periods of strange mental disorders, which left both his mind and body weak. That this lack of sympathy between the Dennises and their neighbors made a deep impression upon the mind of young Dennie is shown in

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<sup>1</sup> Miscellaneous Papers, 24 April, 1775. City Papers of Boston, as stated and quoted by Ellis, ibid., p. 21.

one of his later criticisms: ". . . the wretched and ignorant cottagers who surrounded that 'glorious' green where the first American blood was shed."<sup>1</sup> Dennie's attitude here is an aristocratic and cavalier one which later developed into a stronger prejudice. This attitude helped make him independent and critical of the mundane, common society which surrounded him during his study of law at Walpole; it made him assume an arrogant air which held him aloof from many of his contemporaries; and it made him think of himself as one above the commonplace in life. This attitude helped him to shape his standards of wanting the best in literature, society, morals and character, and environment. His parents' strong support of the Loyalist ideas also combined with his own feeling to make Dennis one of the most vicious critics of American democracy and government, of men such as Paine and Jefferson, and of the political idea of equality. It also strengthened his love for the English way of life as can be seen in the following excerpt from a letter to his parents, written in 1800.

I take this opportunity, if you do not already know this prejudice, to express my strong, well-grounded, and settled attachment to Englishmen, and English principles. . . (F)or a . . . reason I have a strong motive to love that Nation. . . (T)he English character. . . is the most honest, the most generous, the most frank and liberal and foul is that day in our calendar, and bitterly are those patriotic, selfish and Indian traitors, to be cursed who instigated the wretched populace to declare the 4th day of July, 1776, a day of Independence.<sup>2</sup>

The Dennies did not return to Boston in 1777 after the siege. This may seem rather strange, but probably they would have found a similar situation in patriotic sentiment there, so decided to remain in Lexington due to Mr. Dennie's

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dennie (ed), Farmer's Weekly Museum, 13 October, 1795. Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to parents, Philadelphia, 20 May, 1800. Pedder, op. cit., p. 186.

ill health.<sup>1</sup> Too, since he was a Loyalist merchant, his business could not be resumed in Boston.

### Early Education

Dennis's early formal education seems to have been at one of the so-called "dame schools," and later at the Boston Latin School for several years. In a letter to his parents, 1794, he related that his lay reading position demanded "decency of life and such a mode of reading, as your kindness, the instructions of Dame Rogers, and the boyhood perusal of your little library have inspired."<sup>2</sup> This is the only mention that I can find of his "dame school" years, and of the "little library," there is no further reference. However, some idea of many of the books likely to have been found there can be gathered from the titles of his uncle, John Dennis's, library in Cambridge which Joseph, Jr., used extensively.

21 vols.	<u>Universal History</u>
4 vols.	<u>Burns' Justice</u>
2 vols.	<u>Temple's Works</u> <sup>3</sup>
3 vols.	<u>Tillotson's Sermons</u> <sup>4</sup>
5 vols.	<u>Addison's Spectator</u>
4 vols.	<u>Cato's Letters</u>
4 vols.	<u>Spy at Paris</u>
2 vols.	<u>Zoroaster's Travels</u> <sup>5</sup>
	<u>Luther on Gall's</u>
	<u>Religion on Nature</u>
	<u>Travels of Cyrus</u>
	<u>Jewish Spy</u>
	<u>Terence's Comedies</u> <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Joseph, Sr. had found both an excellent doctor and friend there in Dr. Fiske.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to parents, Charlestown, January, 1794. Pedder, op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> Sir William Temple (1628-1699); English statesman and writer.

<sup>4</sup> John Tillotson (1630-1694); Archbishop of Canterbury.

<sup>5</sup> Probably the founder of an ancient Persian religion, Zoroastrianism.

<sup>6</sup> Probably the Roman writer of comedies (190?-159? B.C.).



Sherlock on Judgement  
 Swift's Gulliver's Travels  
 Treatise on Minut. Philos.  
 Stanhope's Epistetus<sup>1</sup>  
 Lard's Gospel History  
 Foster's Sermons  
 Burkett's New Testament  
 Henry on Four Books of Moses  
 Boyle's Style of Scriptures  
 Alexander Pope's Letters  
 Free Thought on Religion  
 Marcus Antoninus  
 Fiddes on Morality  
 Gally's Character on These  
 John Milton's Paradise Regained  
On the State of the Dead<sup>2</sup>

I have also assumed from Dennis's letters that Joseph, Sr.'s. library must have included the following books, as Dennis, at different times-- particularly during his residence at Groton--asked his mother to send the following to him:

Vicesimus Knox's Elegant Extracts in Poetry<sup>3</sup>  
 Edition of Phaedrus<sup>4</sup>  
 Edition of Nepos<sup>5</sup>  
 The Works of Bolingbroke<sup>6</sup>  
 Churchill's poems<sup>7</sup>  
 The Works of Pindar<sup>8</sup>

It was in environs like this that Dennis began to acquire his familiarity with the English classic and other literature upon which he probably based many of his literary standards. He read his father's books over and over, plus other books that he could find, as he was an avid and good reader. In

<sup>1</sup> Probably the 4th Earl of Chesterfield, Phillip D. Stanhope.

<sup>2</sup> List obtained from an inventory made 3 December, 1777. Probats Records of Middlesex County, Massachusetts, as stated in Ellie, Dennis, pp. 25-26.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Mother, Groton, 16 March, 1790. Pedder, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 28: Phaedrus was a Graeco-Roman fabulist during the 1st century, A.D.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 28: Nepos was a Roman historian, 1st century, B.C.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Mother, Charlestown, 12 October, 1791. Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Mother, Charlestown, 8 November, 1791. Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 95.



one of his Lay Preacher essays, he spoke of his youthful readings by comparing them to the Book of Ruth.

Now, although in the days of my youth and fantasy, I have wandered whole nights, delighted, among the fairy fictions of the Arabian tale; although I read ten times the adventures of Don Quixote. . . and of Gulliver; although I have followed with anxious eyes John Bunyan's Christian. . .<sup>1</sup>

Besides the educational opportunities that his uncle's and father's libraries provided for him, his father, a man of intelligence himself, also must have furnished some facets of learning which helped to shape Dennie's future life--particularly that of his character. In a Lay Preacher essay, Dennie told of the lesson in economy given by his father.

In my boyhood, I remember that a parent would sometimes repeat lessons of economy as I sat on his knee, and then lift me in his arms, that I might look on Hogarth's plates of Industry, and Idleness. On youthful fancy the picture was more impressed than the precept.<sup>2</sup>

Of his mother's teachings, Dennie wrote:

For I have a mother. A sickly infancy (speaking of himself), nurtured into health, a giddy and dangerous season of childhood and youth, carefully devoted to letters, attest the salutary cares and a preserving affection of a wise and amiable woman. . . By a mother he (Dennie) was presented with the keys of knowledge, and her liberal spirit sanctioned that scheme of life which it has been his delight to pursue; a scheme elevated above 'low-thoughted care', and 'creeping gain'. . .<sup>3</sup>

Surrounded by such an environment, it is little wonder that young Dennie had early literary ambitions. He did try his hand at poetry, which caused his mother to remark: "He wrote poetry in early life after the manner of Horace

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dennie, The Lay Preacher, No. XIX, edited by John E. Hall. Philadelphia: Harrison Hall, 1817, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Dennie, "On Precipitation," Lay Preacher, Milton Ellis (ed), New York: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Dennie (ed), "Lay Preacher of Pennsylvania; Gazette of the United States. 30 December, 1799, as quoted by Ellis, op. cit., p. 23.

and various other modes."<sup>1</sup> His father, however, tried to dissuade him from a literary career, as such a career in the 1780's was not a gainful one, and it was necessary for a young man to turn to an occupation which would be of financial profit to him. As the Dennises had not yet decided to send Joseph to college, his father thought it best, in 1783, to send him to a commercial school in Boston to learn book-keeping. After a two years' residence there, in which Dennie spent the last year, 1785, in the counting house of Major James Swan from whom he learned the principals of industry and labor, his parents decided to send him to Harvard. Dennie did not like the accounting business, and did not do well in it. He had always hated any form of mathematics, for the reason that it was "a barren speculative science, that neither fills the brain nor meliorates the heart."<sup>2</sup>

In 1785, Dennie was placed in the charge of Reverend Samuel West of Needham--who became one of the greatest influences on Dennie's life--to be prepared for Harvard. In the two years that Dennie spent at Needham, his fondness for good literature was greatly increased, his sympathy with British rather than American ideas of literature and politics was encouraged, and his religious and moral views were given impetus. Of West, Dennie remarked in one of his letters which concerned West's recovery from a serious illness:

That he recovered was a miracle. His valuable life is still protracted, that he may (have) further opportunities to bless and benefit mankind. How would the moral world have groped in darkness, had so bright a lamp been extinguished.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to J. E. Hall, as quoted in his Philadelphia Souvenir, 1827, as quoted by Ellis, Dennie, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Roger Vose, 11 March, 1790. Pedder, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Mother, Groton, 16 March, 1790. Ibid., pp. 27-28.

## Harvard University

On 20 August, 1787, Dennie was entered as a sophomore in Harvard. At that time, the University was comprised of approximately 140 students, and nine<sup>1</sup> faculty. Some idea of the undergraduate curriculum will give further evidence of the part that Dennie's education played toward the development of his later ideas. As follows:

Latin: Livy, Sallust, Horace, Cicero, De Oratore.  
 Greek: Xenophon, the Iliad, and the New Testament.  
 Natural Philosophy: Guthrie's Geography, Burlamaqui's Natural Philosophy, and Ferguson's Astronomy.  
 Math: Arithmetic, algebra (Sanderson's) and Euclid.  
 Rhetoric: Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric, and Lowth's Grammar.  
 Metaphysics: Watt's Logic, and Locke's On the Human Understanding.  
 History: Millott's Elements.  
 Theology: Doddridge's Lectures, and public lectures.  
 Language: Hebrew or French.<sup>2</sup>

Of the situation of literature at Harvard, Joseph Story tells us that:

The college library (Harvard Hall, which contained 13,000 books) was at that time (1794) far less comprehensive and suited to the wants of the students than it is now (1843). It was not as easily accessible, and was not frequented by them. . . Even in respect to English literature and science we had little more than a semi-annual importation of the most common works. . . The English periodicals were then few in number. . .<sup>3</sup>

Of the correspondence between classes, he says:

In respect to academical intercourse, the students had literally none, that was not purely official, except with each other. The different classes were almost strangers to each other, and cold reserve generally prevailed between them.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> President Willard, Professors Webber (math and natural philosophy); Pearson (Hebrew and oriental language); Wigglesworth (religion); Mr. Williams (philosophy); tutors Thomas Thompson, Ebenzer James, Timothy Jennison, John Abbot.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, Dennie, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Life and Letters of Joseph Story, Vol. I, pp. 47-55. Two letters to W. F. Channing, 23 September, and 12 October, 1843, as quoted from Ellis, Dennie, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30.

Of the relationship between students and faculty, Story states:

The President and Professor were never approached, except in the most formal way, and upon official occasion; and in the college yard. . . no student was permitted to keep his hat on if one of the Professors was there.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between the students and the tutors was even more strained as many of the tutors were disliked, probably because they regarded the students as inferiors, and resented any intrusion, whether it was to seek help or not.

This was the Harvard that Dennis entered. Probably the most significant thing that happened to him there was his close friendship with Roger Voss (1765-1842). Although Voss was five years older than Dennis, both boys were drawn together in friendship that was to last long after their Harvard graduation. Probably the things that attracted Dennis to Voss was the latter's excellence as a classical scholar, his talent at poetry, and his pleasing and genial personality. When Dennis left Harvard to go to Needham toward the end of his sophomore year for health reasons, he missed Voss's company more than any other thing at Cambridge. When Dennis was suspended for six months, he leaned heavily upon Voss to send him the books needed for his studies, and "any other book, which in (Voss's) judgement would instruct or amuse. . ."<sup>2</sup> That Voss was one of Dennis's chief influences cannot be denied. While at Groton, although Mr. Chaplin, his tutor, was a "teacher much to be loved both for his mental acuteness and for his agreeable manner,"<sup>3</sup> Dennis wrote latter after letter entreating Voss to come visit him. Voss seemed to be Dennis's

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Roger Voss, Groton, 24 February, 1790, Pedder, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Roger Voss, trans., Groton, 7 March, 1790. Ibid., p. 19. Harvard authorities had given Dennis the choice of studying with Chaplin or Rev. Mr. Parson of Amherst until he was reinstated at Harvard.



sounding board for the latter's ideas concerning literature, religion, politics, women, etc. Vose made Dennie think more about life, and about his position in it. When Vose disagreed with him, it gave Dennie a chance to express his views with supporting evidence. This, perhaps, was the beginning of Dennie's career as a critic, as with and through Vose, he learned the rudiments of criticism. As an example of this, Dennie and Vose carried on a lengthy correspondence concerning David Hume, philosopher and historian. Dennie's criticisms against Hume are so interesting that I have taken the liberty to reproduce in entirety his arguments. They also show that Dennie could like a man for his writing style, yet loathe him for his ideas--an approach of criticism which Dennie used extensively as editor of the Farmer's Museum and Port Folio. Finally, they show Dennie's style of criticism--the way he supports his views by example, his logical and well-developed form, his tact and taste which gently persuade his opponent to engage his views, and his use of elevated language.

I am fully sensible, that, by many of the students Hume is admired; of this number I perceive you (Vose) are a part. I cannot blame you. The scholar, who could not admire the elegance of style, and the ingenuity of reasoning for which that author is so eminently distinguished, I should pronounce grossly deficient in taste. To deny him praise as an author would be literary blasphemy; but considered as a philosopher and as a man, I think Roger, that by every Rationalist he must be condemned. Logicians have long since told us, common sense daily tells us that all our knowledge acquired by reasoning is a deduction from intuitive perceptions and ultimately founded on them. Now, if an author prompted by vanity, by a fondness for singularity and paradox, availing himself of the ambiguity and poverty of language boldly attacks first principles, and because they cannot be demonstrated true, sceptically and rashly doubts of their existence, what can be expected, should readers follow his example, but the utter extirpation of Science, Morals and Religion. Every novice knows that intuition shines by its own brightness, that nothing more lucid can be adduced for its illumination. Nothing can be more puerile than to attempt a confutation of those things, which we cannot but believe. Notwithstanding all the vaunts of false philosophy, we cannot withhold our assent from the belief of real existences, and if the



disciples of Pyrrho<sup>1</sup> will doubt that the sun shines, tho' to be convinced they need but open their eyes. Common Sense must apply to them the epithet of fools, or another still more opprobrious. I now hear you say, Dennie, you must allow his arguments are close, ingenious, and incapable of direct refutation. I concede it. But be it remembered that the foundation that this sophistical structure is erected upon a pile, if the expression may be allowed, a pile of petitiones principle. Further if principles be observed, cannot be proved by anything more evident, it is true a direct refutation cannot be framed, for obvious reasons, but a reductio ad absurdum will, equally as well force assent, and produce the brightest conviction. I know not by what means this mode of reasoning came to be styled indirect, which, as it should seem, involves an idea of its inefficiency, for my very partial smattering of the mathematics suggest that Euclid frequently adopts this mode of demonstration, and you need not be told that the reasonings of that author are conclusive. I am not surprised at the popularity of Hume's scepticism. His language is pure and elegant. His arguments plausible and replete with subtlety. Awar of the forbidding appearance of a metaphysical folio, he has conveyed his reasonings in the gay and agreeable form of essays, hoping, by this artifice, to fix volatility and to rouse indolence. Pleased with the vehicle in which his poison was conveyed, and soothed by doctrines to their wishes most favorable, the superficial, the ignorant and profligate were ready to give the Universe out of being, and to scruple even their own existence. The opinions of this celebrated sceptic were not long suffered to insult the common sense of mankind. . .<sup>2</sup>

Vose and Dennie rarely disagreed, however, as Dennie respected Vose's views and judgments too much to seek fallacies in them. Vose's influence was so great that whenever he and Dennie found corresponding views, Dennie's attitudes toward whatever they agreed upon were strengthened considerably. As an example of this, Dennie once wrote Vose that it was his intention to write a history on his dismissal from Harvard and his treatment there. Prefixing this would be "in imitation of modern novelists. . . a Latin citation, which like a tavern sign, will announce to its readers the entertainment within. . ."<sup>3</sup> Soon after apparently, Vose told Dennie of his plans to write epistles,

<sup>1</sup> Pyrrho (360?-270? B.C.), Greek sceptic philosopher.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Roger Vose, Groton, May 16, 1790. Fedder, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Roger Vose, Groton, 24 February, 1790. Ibid., p. 12.

prefixed with Latin mottoes. Dennie, quite pleased with this wrote: "I highly applaud your intention of prefixing mottoes to your epistles. You know that a Latin citation is to me a rich feast, particularly when selected by your taste. . ."<sup>1</sup> Not much later, Dennie started writing his first Farrago essays--which were prefixed by Latin mottoes.

Moreover, Dennie depended upon Vose's judgment concerning the reading of books. Vose undoubtedly guided some of Dennie's reading interests--particularly since the former was an excellent student of the classics. Dennie said of Vose's judgment on literature:

Nothing affords me more pleasure, than your sentiments of the books you peruse. Conscious of your mental independency, of your judgement, and freedom from undue bias, when I peruse your opinions, I am sure to contemplate an exact transcript of truth, in the light in which she appears to you.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, Vose, I believe, influenced Dennie to turn to a law profession. Dennie had previously entertained the thought of pursuing a medical profession as he believed a successful practice would be highly lucrative. In a letter<sup>3</sup> to Vose he states all his arguments for deciding upon the medical field, and seems quite definite upon his decision. However, Vose in his reply urged Dennie to practice law instead of medicine.

Your retentive memory will soon give you an acquaintance with the principals of law; and your knowledge of history; your acquaintance with national policy; will entitle you, in case your health admit, to the first offices of the state. I will dare predict with tolerable fortune, you will be able to convince the Southern states, that Massachusetts can produce a Madison. In the desk likewise, you would undoubtedly shine, could you exchange a small quantity of the rake for an equivalent of prudence and gravity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Roger Vose, Groton, 16 March, 1790. Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Roger Vose, Groton, 16 May, 1790. Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Roger Vose, Groton, 29 May, 1790. Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Dennie, Dennie Papers, 12 May, 1790, as quoted by Ellis, Dennie, pp. 43-44.

Vose's counsel, plus that of other friends who tried to dissuade him from the practice of medicine because of his poor health, evidently succeeded, as Dennie, in December, 1790, arrived in Charlestown to study law under Benjamin West.

During Dennie's years as a student at Harvard, the only other two significant things were his suspension, and the contacts which he made among his fellow-students and his friends at Groton.

Dennie's suspension<sup>1</sup> was never to be forgotten by him, and Harvard was always a fruitful subject for criticism as a result of his "mistreatment." In a letter to Gilbert Hubbard, Dennie explained why he thought he had been treated with prejudice. He believed that Harvard had been prejudiced against him because he had entered the sophomore class, instead of the freshman class, upon his arrival. "They supposed that a capability of entering the second class and a dissolute character were inseparable (sic)."<sup>2</sup>

The following paragraph shows Dennie's disappointment and resentment, plus his independence and unabashed criticism of those things he deemed unjust. These two characteristics were two of the foundations upon which his style of later criticisms are based.

... I ever held it as a maxim that the bulk of the Government (Harvard's), like the races of Jackasses, discharged their duty faithfulest, when most soundly beaten. Accordingly I was loud and bold in my censures, when anything censurable appeared ... I delivered (sic) my declamation. Whatever might have been my views in pronouncing that parliamentary speech in the manner I did, yet as they never could prove my crime & the whole was presumptive, it was a downright arbitrary star-chamber proceeding--and such slight grounds did by no means justify my condemnation. ... With regard to the Government I shall ever feel a rooted

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<sup>1</sup> He was suspended for a period of six months starting December 21, 1789, as a result of being disrespectful to a tutor in his declamation.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Gilbert Hubbard, Groton, April, 1790. Pedder, op. cit., p. 34.

prejudice against them for their conduct towards me. A prejudice, which not time shall destroy.<sup>1</sup>

Dennie did not forget, as attested to in his Lay Preacher series. In the essay "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" Dennie discussed indolence as concerning the individual and institutions. One example that he gives for a cause of his own idleness, "the tediousness and insipidity of the Lay Preacher"<sup>2</sup> is "Clumsy College where. . .the heads of the college were sometimes lifted up when some braying dunce vociferated his declamation, but 'the still small voice' of genius rarely interrupted their learned repose."<sup>3</sup> Dennie's most vicious attack on Harvard is contained, however, in a second essay, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," which is reproduced in Appendix A.

Even though Dennie had many disappointments at Harvard, he, nevertheless, was regarded highly by his classmates. W. W. Clapp tells us that even though "he was a man of strong prejudices and formed rash conclusions, . . . he was regarded as possessing a strong intellect and a brilliant genius."<sup>4</sup> He states further that Dennie was the chosen companion to many of the students because of his ready wit, easy address, readiness at repartee, brilliant social attraction, and attractive person. He was included in all the festive occasions, and was regarded as one of the better-liked students during his school term.

Some of his classmates became, in later years, contributors to Dennie's Port Folio. Probably one of the most prominent was Josiah Quincy who had once said of Dennie: "The most talented, taking light literature as a standard, was Joseph Dennie, whose acquaintance with the best English classics was (surprising)

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Gilbert Hubbard, Groton, April, 1790. Pedder, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Dennie, The Lay Preacher, Ellis (ed), p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> W. W. Clapp, Joseph Dennie, p. 8.



at that period. His imagination was vivid and he wrote with great ease and faculty. . .<sup>1</sup> Quincy contributed a series of political articles entitled "Climenole," which professed to be reviews, both literary and political, of Memorabilia Democratica, or the History of Democracy, by Slaveslap Kidnap, Esq. As the pseudonym implies, the series were satires which attacked the Democratic administration from the point of view that its policies were not directed toward equality in government, but slavery.

Another classmate who contributed to the Port Folio was Thomas Boylston Adams, brother of John Quincy Adams. Other prominent members of his class were: Samuel Crafts, a representative (1817-1825) and governor (1820-1830) of Vermont; George Sullivan, member of Congress (1811-1815) and Attorney General of New Hampshire (1815-1835). These companions undoubtedly expressed political viewpoints, which may have formed some of Dennie's toward the Federalist and Democratic parties.

Dennie's closest friend in Groton was Timothy Bigelow, a graduate of Harvard, and a lawyer at Groton (1789-1812). Bigelow was an excellent writer and a grand speaker, a person of "unblemished morals, endowed with exquisite sensibility, (who) expands the arms of benevolence to all mankind."<sup>2</sup> Dennie spent many hours in Bigelow's company, and undoubtedly was influenced by his fine character, genius, and knowledge of law and literature.

While at Groton, Dennie lived among his favorite authors by means of their writings, enjoyed the rustic way of life, and tried his hand at writing poetry and essays. Besides his letters which showed in their ease and fluency, often times inflated language, innovations of italics and quotations, the

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Quincy, Life of Josiah Quincy, pp. 30-33, as quoted by Ellis, Dennie, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Mother, Groton, 9 March, 1790. Pedder, op. cit., p. 21.



style of the Farrago essays and Lay Preacher "sermons" to come, his earliest literary work was written here. A verse, Panegyrick on Thompson<sup>1</sup> signed by Academicus, was printed in the February, 1789, issue of The Massachusetts Magazine.

The influences, as seen above, were varied and great on Dennis. His family background made it possible for him to enjoy those things accorded to the merchant aristocracy and established, respected families. Such advantages as a cultured home environment, substantial finances, and social position enabled him to meet and converse with those of education, to acquaint himself with the best in literature, and the best in social circles. This set Dennis apart from the "million"<sup>2</sup> who inhabited Boston and the surrounding country, and shaped his aristocratic and cavalier attitude of his later life. The Revolutionary War, and the Dennises' removal to Lexington only added impetus to this attitude, plus the formulations of his political ideas. Dennis's friends, particularly Voss, Bigelow, and Reverend West furthered his desire to pursue the best in literature, and influenced him in character, in religion, politics, and in the choice of occupation. His years at Harvard not only extended his education, but helped sustain his independency of mind, his viewpoints toward justice and education, and enabled him to acquaint himself with classmates who later became prominent in the history of the United States. The influences that Dennis remembered most vividly were those which guided his steps toward the pursuit of literature, for as he later remarked in one of his Lay Preacher Essays:

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis's expression for the vulgar, rustic, mundane type of living by people of the same character.

Whenever I reflect upon my habitual attachment to books, I feel a new glow of gratitude towards the Power who gave me a mind thus disposed, and to those liberal friends who have allowed the utmost latitude of indulgence to my propensity. Had I been born on a barbarous shore, denied the glorious privileges of education and interdicted an approach to the rich provinces of literature, I should have been the most miserable of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennie, "On the Pleasures of Study," Lay Preacher, No. II. Hall, p. 101.

## THE SECOND PERIOD

## Law Student

Dennie chose to study law under Benjamin West at Charlestown for several reasons. First, West, who was the brother of Dennis's beloved Reverend Samuel West, was "incomparably the best lawyer in this Quarter (Charlestown vicinity)," and praised for "his probity prudence & Elocution."<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the climate there would be more beneficial to Dennis's health than elsewhere.

Dennis's life in Charlestown was quite happy. In a letter<sup>2</sup> to his parents, he described his life as "a regular philosophic" one as he listened as attentively as he could to reason, and kept "wild delusive passion at (a) distance." He rose at dawn, and retired between eight or nine in the evening. He exercised considerably, which he believed, tended to improve his health. For the greater part of the day, he studied; then around four or five in the afternoon, he would "(go) into the best company & enjoy social hours." The most significant thing about his life here, was his enjoyment of the "best company," as it shows Dennis's continuing desire to place himself in the most prominent and intellectual circles. Doctor William Page, with whom Dennis resided for a time in Charlestown, is an example of the type of person that Dennis made a point to cultivate. Dennis was quite pleased to call Dr. Page his friend as he had the handsomest home in town, was the principal physician of the village, and was active in politics as Representative to the Massachusetts General Assembly.<sup>3</sup> Dennis could enjoy "the best company this quarter affords" at his home, and could partake of the ideas and information which

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to parents, Westmoreland, 1790. Pedder, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to parents, Charlestown, 31 May, 1791. Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to parents, 10 April, 1791; 6 November, 1791; 17 April, 1792. Ibid., pp. 96-102, passim.

Page, "a Gentleman & Man of the world,"<sup>1</sup> could give him in their frequent conversations about literature and politics. Dennie believed his position was so "eligible" that he wished to remain with Page during the continuance of his stay in Charlestown.

As he did at Harvard, Dennie met fellow-students who would, at one time or another, become connected with his later literary ventures. Among these were Samuel West, Jr., John Curtis Chamberlain, and Samuel Hunt. Of West, Dennie said, "Depend on it he is Stanhope (Lord Chesterfield's family name) in literature; may he be Chesterfield in politeness."<sup>2</sup> He later acted as Dennie's attorney in Charlestown when the latter was in Boston working on the Tablet, and also contributed to Dennie's Farmer's Museum. Chamberlain contributed a series of essays entitled "The Hermit" to the Museum, and Hunt also contributed to it.

Dennie studied diligently and, at first, was quite pleased with his progress. However, in time, he began to get discouraged about his prospects as a successful lawyer. The first hint of this feeling was related in a letter to his mother. This letter, I believe, is another example of Dennie's character. As evidenced, he wanted the very best that life had to offer, but by the same token, Dennie wanted to give the very best of himself. If he believed that he was mediocre in any way, he could not be satisfied. In the following passage, Dennie describes his fears that he will not be able to speak as eloquently as he might wish; therefore, he is not quite certain that he will be the best lawyer that he could be, as, in his opinion, a good lawyer not only knew his law, but also had to have a certain way of expressing his knowledge, if he expected fame and profit.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to parents, 6 November, 1791. Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to mother, 21 January, 1792. Ibid., p. 97.



I am not master, either in writing or speaking of that brilliant, seducing, commanding eloquence which is necessary in my profession both for glitter & gold, both for fame & money. . . Law is a nauseous pill, & cannot be poured down the throats even of the vulgar without gilding.<sup>1</sup>

That Dennie did learn to speak eloquently--perhaps too much so, can be seen in this oft-told experience of Dennie's debut as a lawyer, which probably prompted him to recall his words to his parents that his methods were showy, but not profound, bold and glittering, but not sufficient in judgment. This experience was also one of the causes of Dennie's gradual retirement from the law profession. As told by Royall Tyler:

No young lawyer ever entered on practice with more favorable auspices. The senior members of the bar augured success, and he numbered all who were valuable among the jurors as particular friends. As it was generally known when he was to deliver 'his maiden speech,' by a kind of tacit agreement the gentlemen of the bar resolved to afford him the most favorable arena for the display of his eloquence. The opposing counsel had engaged to suspend all interference, although his statements deviated ever so far from the fact.

The court opened, and as if by previous concern, all other business was suspended, and our young advocate, after bowing gracefully, assumed the air of an orator, and addressed the court.

He began with a luminous history of compulsory payments, he showed clearly that as knowledge was diffused humanity prevailed even from the savage era, when the debtor, his wife and children, were sold into slavery to satisfy the demands of the creditor, and the corpse of the insolvent was denied the rites of sepulture, through the iron age of our English ancestors, when the debtor was incarcerated in 'salva et arcta custodia,' down to the present day, when by the amelioration of the laws, the statutes of bankruptcy and gaol delivery had humanely liberated the body of the unfortunate debtor from prison, upon the surrender of his estate. He observed, that in the progress of knowledge, the municipal courts had, by interposing, 'the law's delay' between the vindictive avarice of the judiciary department, preceded the Legislative in the merciful march of humanity. That the time was not far distant when the Legislative would repeal those statutes which provided for imprisonment for debt, and punished a virtuous man for a criminal merely because he was poor.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to mother, Charlestown, 12 October, 1791. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

But aside from these general considerations, he begged leave to lay the defendant's unhappy case before the court; he would 'a round unvarnished tale deliver.' His client was a husbandman, a husband and the father of a large family, who depended solely upon the labour of his hands for bread--he had seen better days--but his patrimonial farm had been sold for Continental money, and the whole lost by depreciation, whilst others had been getting gain--a deep soar in his side, occasioned by the thrust of a British bayonet at the battle of Bunker Hill, was all he had to remunerate him for his services as a soldier during the revolutionary war. Here the 'poet's eye began to roll in a fine phrenzy!' We saw the hapless husbandman 'plodding his weary way' through the chill blasts of winter storm, and seeking through the drifting snow his log cottage, beneath the craggy side of an abrupt precipice; 'the taper's solitary ray' appears--vanishes--and again lights up hope in his heart--the door opens--children run to kiss their sire's return and climb his knees the envied kiss to share--the busy housewife prepares the frugal repast, the wicker chair is drawn before the spacious hearth, 'and the crackling faggot fliss,' the labours of the day are forgotten and all is serenity and domestic bliss--the bible is opened--the psalm is sung, and the father of the family rises in the midst of his offspring and invokes a blessing upon his country and his government and fervently prays that his freedom may last as long as the sun and moon shall endure--acknowledges his own trespasses and pours out his heart in gratitude, that in the midst of judgment God remembered mercy--that though despoiled of wealth the wife of his youth was continued to him. His children were blest with health, that they had a roof to cover them from the wintry storm, and that under his Divine protection they might sleep in peace with none to disturb them or make them afraid. But scarcely does the incense of prayer ascend from that golden censer, a good man's heart, when an appalling knock is heard; the wooden latch is broken, the door is widely thrown open--Enter the bailiff, 'down whose hard, unmeaning face ne'er stole the pitying tear,' with the writ of execution issued in this cause, he arrests the hapless father, and amidst the swoonings of the wife, the sobbings and imbecile opposition of his children, he is dragged 'through the pelting of the pitiless storm' to a loathsome prison.

Was not his a case to be distinguished from the common herd of parties, which cumbered the court's docket? Was not some consideration to be had for a brave man who had bled for that Independence without which their honours would not now dignify the bench as the magistrates of a free people?--was rigid justice untempered with mercy to be found alone in the Judicial Courts of a people renowned for their humanity? and shall 'human laws, which would be made only to check the arm of wickedness,' be changed into instruments of oppression and cruelty?

The orator ceased--mute attention accompanied the delivery, and at the close all were charmed and all silent; even the opposing counsel sat hesitating betwixt his fees and his feelings, and forbore to reply. This silence, which our young advocate seemed to notice with peculiar complacency, was broken from the bench. The judge, an unlettered farmer, who, by the prevalence of party, had obtained the summit of yeoman ambition, a seat on the bench of an Inferior Court, who knew only the technical jargon of the court, and to whom the language and pathos of Dennie were alike unintelligible, sat during the delivery of the address, rolling a pair of 'lack lustre eyes' with a vacant stare sometimes at the orator and then at the bar, as if seeking most curiously for meaning, and who was perhaps restrained only by the respectful attention of the latter from interrupting the speaker. The Judge broke silence.

Judge: I confes I am in rather a kind of quandary, I profess I am somewhat dubus, I can't say that I know for sartin what the young gentleman would be at.

Counsellor V(ose): My brother Dennie, may it please your honour, has been enforcing his motion for an Impanelance on the part of the Defendant, in the cause of Patrick McGripinolaw, et alii, Plaintiff vs. Noadiah Chubber.

Judge: Oh! Aye! now I believe I understand--the young gentleman wants the cause to be hung up for the next term, duz he?

Counsellor V: Yes, may it please the court.

Judge: Well, well, if that's all he wanted, why couldn't he say so in a few words, pat to the purpose, without all this larry own lurry.

Our advocate took his hat and gloves from the table, cast a look of ineffable contempt upon the Pasotian magistrate and stalked out of the court house.<sup>1</sup>

Dennie's discouragement manifested itself in other forms. He began to feel that perhaps his standarde for life were a bit too high--even for him. In a letter to his mother,<sup>2</sup> he bewailed the fact that his ambitions had formerly taken him to "an exceedingly high mountain," but that now he had

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis, Dennie, pp. 59-62.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to parents, Charlestown, 17 April, 1792. Pedder, op. cit., pp. 103-4.

found "oastle building" an inconvenience. Shortly after, he hinted that he would soon be turning to other things to supplement his forthcoming law practice. One of the "other things" would be literature, as he compared himself to Pope, Dr. Isaac Watts, and Philip Doddridge who, Dennie believed, had supplemented their unsatisfactory financial conditions with other more beneficial and rewarding occupations.<sup>1</sup>

### The Farrago Essays

Dennie did turn to literature in the winter of 1792, when he submitted his first Farrago essay to the Morning Ray, a small Vermont newspaper. Following his essay for 21 February, he submitted a second for the March 6th issue. However, even though the Ray intended to publish still a third contribution, Dennie did not submit it until it was too late for that issue's printing. No further essays appeared, then, after his second contribution, and if he had proposed submitting more, he could not as the Ray went out of circulation a few weeks later.

The Farrago series was to be on a variety of subjects (farrago Latin farrago means "mixed fodder," hence "medley"), and was his first real attempt to write in the English 18th century style in which he could "revive the Goldsmith vivacity of thought, and the Addisonian sweetness in expression."<sup>2</sup> In his Farrago, number one, Dennie presented the subjects which his future series would take:

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to parents, 6 November, 1791. Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to parents, Charlestown, January, 1794. Ibid., pp. 138-139.



Manners and dress and newest fashions,  
 Books, characters, and human passions;  
 Men acting well, or who astray go  
 Ingredients form for the Farrago.<sup>1</sup>

In the same issue, Dennie wrote one of his best descriptions of Addison, the Addisonian style, and the Spectator.<sup>2</sup>

Numbers II and III followed Dennie's praises of the Spectator by being written in similar style (especially if compared to Spectator number II.), and, as John Hall suggests, paint a picture of many of Dennie's own character traits at that time.<sup>3</sup>

The Morning Ray, or Impartial Oracle in which these essays were first published, was published at Windsor, Vermont, by Judah P. Spooner, a distant cousin of Mary Dennie, and J. Reed Hutchins. It was quite typical of the newspapers in that period, as it was modelled after Addison and Steele's Spectator series, had a high-sounding name, an elevated motto--"The Wilderness Shall Bud and Blossom as a Rose," carried on the usual departments of advertising, local news, proposals for publishing books, news from abroad, a literary page,--and a brief career (November, 1791-April, 1792).

Dennie's Farrago essays were still being published a year later. Ellis found that numbers VIII, IX, X, and XIII made their first appearances in The Eagle, or Dartmouth Centinel between 17 August and 28 October, 1793,<sup>4</sup> but of their content, I have no knowledge. The Eagle was, I believe, a much better paper than the Ray for Dennie's work, as it had a distinct and better literary section than did its contemporaries. Besides its poetical department, the

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dennie, The Farrago, No. I, as quoted by Ellis, Dennie, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix D.

<sup>4</sup> Ellis, Dennie, Appendix D, pp. 238-239.

Aonian Rill, it often devoted several columns to literary essays, parodies, humorous articles, and moral speculations.<sup>1</sup> It was started by Josiah Dunham at Hanover, New Hampshire, 22 July, 1793.

### Lay Reader

Not only had Dennie ventured into the literary field, but had also entered the lay reading field during this period. This occupation was to form the basic ideas for his Lay Preacher series. It was quite by accident that Dennie began lay reading, and somewhat of a shift in his opinion. When Dennie was deciding upon which occupation to enter, he wrote to Vose that the study of divinity had far too many disadvantages, as it was "an inseperable (sic) bar to preferment, (it checked) every ambitious project, (it confined) a man to the lowest vale of obscurity, (it precluded) my pleasures, (and it inspired) a starchedness of thinking and behavior totally repugnant to (his) liberal views."<sup>2</sup> Too, in a letter to his parents, he joking said. . . "I daily read sermons & Bishop Butler;<sup>3</sup> when I review the above ideas, I borrow an expression from Voltaire & explain I also am a little theologist."<sup>4</sup> When Dennie wrote the above sentiment, he was a boy who enjoyed frequent beers at the local ale-houses, the boisterous parties to which he sometimes went, and a youthful spirit which did not want to be hampered by the moral "starchedness" of religious study.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Vose, Groton, 29 April, 1790. Pedder, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Bishop Butler--Joseph Butler (1692-1752), English prelate and theologian.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to parents, Charlestown, 17 April, 1792. Pedder, op. cit., p. 106.

However, when Dennie accepted the office of lay reader at the Episcopal Church in Claremont,<sup>1</sup> in 1793, he was a mature man, who still enjoyed drinking beer with his friends, but who believed that personal value could be gained from the study of divinity. It did, however, cut down on many of his social pleasures, and he could not be the gay, debonaire youth that he had previously been. Probably more important to Dennie, however, than learning religious lessons, was the fact that he needed money (the lay reader's pay was 24 s. per Sunday for four Sundays) in order to live in the style that he wished-- good clothes, living condition, etc. The job also gave him a chance to practice his elocution. When Dennie accepted the job, little did he know it would be of such value to his future literary career.

His first announcement of his new career is in a letter to his parents, which also shows his lively, yet direct style of writing, which at this time was taking the shape of the style of his later writings.

. . . On a Sunday, when in expectancy of a neighbouring Curate, the villagers had convened and were disappointed (sic) of their Homily, Esquires Stephens<sup>2</sup> & Hubbard,<sup>3</sup> at the request of the people, requested me to read the Liturgy of the Church & Sermon of Sterne. I diffidently complied, and was candidly heard. The inimitable union of grandeur and simplicity that Paley<sup>4</sup> asserts is discoverable in the Church Service, operating on ambition, induced such a degree of exertion in the Reader, as to gain, tho' perhaps not deserve, the applause of the Hearers. A candid Claremonter, who, in Goldsmith's phrase, with open mouth, swallowed my words, favorably reported to the Wardens & Vestry of a vacant church at his native Village. (Claremont) Accordingly the ensuing week, I received an official message from Judge Kingsbury a leading member of the Episcopal Society desiring me to be at the trouble of a visit there, to read Prayers on the next Sunday. This was the first moment that I conceived the project of rendering my talent

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<sup>1</sup> Dennie had previously read in the church in Charlestown.

<sup>2</sup> Col. Samuel Stevens.

<sup>3</sup> Justice Hubbard. He held many town offices in Charlestown.

<sup>4</sup> William Paley (1742-1805), English theologian, philosopher, and writer on religious subjects.

gainful, of allaying in some small degree my thirst for independence & partially relieving you from the justly intolerable burden of my support.<sup>1</sup> I cheerfully owned my task on Saturday afternoon, & foreseeing from a knowledge of my ear soothing powers & the blind admiration that Mob has for sound; foreseeing the probable issue of this business, on Sunday more I sallied forth on this clerical enterprise, like Haman, joyful and with a glad heart.<sup>2</sup>

Dennie then goes on to explain that "his business when in embryo (sic)" was suggested by some of his friends in Charlestown to his mother and some of his Boston friends, in an erroneous manner. They questioned the combining of two professions--especially that of lawyer and preacher. To this, Dennie answered:

. . . Some, as I am informed, have ingeniously conjectured that I have renounced my Profession, others wonder how the airy levity of my spirit can be confined in a Pulpit without evaporating indecorously (sic), and all talk of the fantastic junction of lawyer & Priest. But that sage, tho' small, portion of Massachusetts soothsayers, who have chosen to augur so inauspiciously my fate cannot discern though your Good Sense easily can, a capital distinction between Reader & Inducted Clergyman. A casual glance on the Ecclesiastical etiquette of Great Britain which the Episcopalians here servilely copy discovers to you; that a meek Readership does not in the least militate with my secular & lay employments, that it demands not Hypocrisy (sic) of heart or face, but decency of life. . . The task of Sunday does not in the least derange the study of Blackstone. The essence of the whole is this that a day formerly passed vacantly or in miscellaneous reading, is now dedicated to a useful exercise in elocution, which, by accustoming me to the sight & criticism of the many inspires confidence: furnishes memory with energetic Biblical phrases, & fancy with happy allusion, and lastly furnishes a small stipend that pays my board & defies the mechanics dun. . .<sup>3</sup>

Dennie was quite successful as a lay reader, so much so that he was offered by St. John's Episcopal Church, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a permanent job at £200 annually. Dennie considered this offer quite carefully, and many

<sup>1</sup> His parents had been giving him an allowance.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to parents, Charlestown, January, 1794. Pedder, op. cit., pp. 132-133.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 133-134.



of his friends told him that as a church divine, he would benefit both himself and others more than if he stayed in the law profession. Dennie thought himself better suited for the pulpit than the bar, as he believed he could talk with more ease to the former audience. Dennie also parlayed the honesty of a religious occupation against the dishonesty of the bar. As he said to his parents--"Undoubtedly one is the more honest vocation. I often witness a degree of oppression, in a Lawyer's office almost unavoidable, but to me, whose hands have not yet grown callous with the receipt of guilty bribes, there is something painful to the moral sense in wringing farthings from the poor misguided peasant."<sup>1</sup> This, I feel, is one of the best examples of Dennie's integrity, and the way that he reasoned things out: he would pit both questions against one another, then proceed from there. What Dennie would have finally decided, we will never know, for before he had to return a decision to Portsmouth, he lost his job as lay reader in Claremont. John E. Hall states that the Claremonters objected to his playing whist and smoking cigars on Saturday evenings.<sup>2</sup>

Here then was a man of conflicting interests: he loved a gay social life, yet wanted to be a minister, a position in which a gay social life was turned in the direction of a dedicated life to God. Dennie's parents may have influenced his decision somewhat against a religious occupation had Dennie not lost his job, as they did not believe that he should throw away three years of studying for a law practice for another position which would involve additional years of study, and which, in the end, would not afford him the same financial benefits. Thus, Dennie returned to finish his law studies, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> J. E. Hall, Philadelphia Souvenir as quoted by Ellis, Dennie, p. 34.

assured his parents that when the time came for him to be assigned to a practice, he could promise that he would be completely skilled in the "ordinary practice of Law."<sup>1</sup>

### Law Practice

Dennie's clerkship expired in December, 1793, but not in time for him to be admitted to the December term of court. He had originally planned to enter practice somewhere in the Massachusetts Counties of Middlesex or Suffolk, but upon learning that the area was already over-populated with "a shoal of junior lawyers keeping vacant offices. . . for the purpose of idle assemblage of chat, never darkened by the shadow of clients,"<sup>2</sup> he decided to set up a law office in Charlestown. His choice was again an example of his fine character--the type of character, Dennie believed, a man had to possess if ever he was going to be a great man. His standard of honesty was such that he would not barter his integrity for money.

. . .they (the junior lawyers) are compelled to seek a precarious support for the Gaming Table, or. . . in mere desperation marry some Tristan Shandy bonnetted jilt of fortune & vilely suffer themselves to be carried home by her to a Father's house there to lead a life in Shakespeare's phrase, most stinkingly dependent. Now I would rather cut my throat with a penny Razor than suffer even a plan of such a life to sweep across my mind.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in March, 1794, Dennie opened a law office in Charlestown. After a residence of one month there, Dennie informed his parents that he was doing a little business, but had expectations of doing more.<sup>4</sup> More important, though, he was determined to assert his independence, and to "uphold and to

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to parents, January, 1794. Pedder, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to parents, Charlestown, January, 1797. Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to parents, Charlestown, 2 April, 1794. Ibid., p. 142.

defend cases with unspotted hands."<sup>1</sup> To Dennie, independence was of vital importance. From his early years in Lexington, to his school days at Harvard, and now to his occupation as a lawyer, this attribute had become one of his major standards. Included within this characteristic was pride, for without pride, Dennie thought that a man could have no independence, and without independence, no man could have pride. Here again, we see the qualities--the standards--which were later incorporated into his criticisms of American literature. With integrity, Dennie could honestly criticize; with independence, he could state only what he believed and not what the mass believed; with pride, he could rely upon his judgments, and be convinced that they were the best possible conclusions according to his own standards of literature.

Dennie was at this time twenty-five, and although he had not become "the great man" that he had wished to be by now, he was not discouraged, for as he told his parents, he was respected in the community, was worth about 4/6, and was not in the debt of anyone. He said, "Few men of 25 are in a better situation--and none. . . feel more proud, or enjoy a higher station on the Rock of Independence."<sup>2</sup> Dennie continued to enjoy the best in society, and since he sought the pleasure and company that was afforded to a gentleman, and possessing the feelings of a gentleman, Dennie was determined to look like a gentleman--another standard which Dennie set for the best things in life.

I am determined if I am poor never to feel, much less look so, to wear glossy coats and shift them, before they are thread-bare.<sup>3</sup>

Probably the most important thing that happened to Dennie during his first year as a full-fledged Charlestown lawyer was his relationship with

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

Royall Tyler. Tyler was in Charlestown acting as a substitute minister. Both he and Dennie had similar interests which soon drew them together. Tyler was a Harvard graduate (1776), and like Dennie had been suspended for a period of time. He had studied law in Boston and had enjoyed the company of prominent men: Trumbull, the painter; Christopher Gore, Governor of Massachusetts, and United States Senator; Rufus King, legislator and English ambassador; and William Eustis, Governor, congressman, and Secretary of War. Due to poor finances, he had left Boston, and had practiced law in Guilford, Vermont, a small town south of Charlestown. Tyler was also a strong Federalist, and a man of letters, having already published by 1794 his play, The Contrast (1787), the first play distinctively American in authorship, setting, and spirit. Attracted to each other, Dennie and Tyler read classic authors, and planned a literary partnership which was to be life-long. They entitled this partnership, The Shop of Colan and Spandee, which planned to offer for sale various literary articles--verse or prose, sober or witty, moral or political, parody or elegy, etc. Dennie, who was Colan was to contribute the prose articles, while Tyler, Spandee, was to contribute the verse. Actually both supplied each, signing the initials "C" or "S" to their work, much in the same manner that Addison and Steele signed their works in the Spectator essays. An elaborate, long, and comic advertisement of the Shop was printed in the Eagle, 28 July, 1794, and the contributions from it were published there until March, 1795.

Dennie's literary ventures had not stopped with the productions of the Shop, however. His literary reputation had finally begun to grow, for as he observed to his mother:



The Classic Editor of the Centinel (The Eagle) has republished these trifles (his Farrago essays) & 12 or 14 of the most generally circulated gazettes have devoted a Column to the Farrago.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after, Dennie left Charlestown for Boston. This move was a result of many things. His debut (see pages 22-24) as a lawyer had failed miserably, and may have partially influenced him to return from his law profession. Of this experience, Dennie spoke humorously, yet showed his contempt for the uneducated, and unlettered mass of humanity. When Royall Tyler asked him shortly afterwards to take a seduction case, before a classical judge--a case which would have offered an excellent opportunity for Dennie's talent of eloquent speech, he refused, saying:

It may do for you, my friend, to pursue this eorid business--you can address the ignoble vulgar in their own Alsatia dialect. I remember the Baectian Judge, and it is the last time I will ever attempt to batter down a mud wall with roses.<sup>2</sup>

Another reason for leaving Charlestown was that Dennie, as a man accustomed to the best in society, found himself thrown with the "coarse masses of common life." As Royall Tyler styled Dennie's law experiences:

In his study he could read and admire the profound lucubrations of the English jurists; the theory was beautiful and interesting; but to carry his knowledge into practice--in the course of his professional business to encounter the groes familiarity of an ill-bred client, the vulgar sarcasm of the bench, his soul distained--and it is entirely probable that his extreme irritability of the mental nerve would have caused him to abandon with equal promptitude any other profession or business which brought him into familiar contact with the coarse mass of common life.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most important reason for leaving was his desire for wealth and fame. These, he believed, could be accomplished through a literary

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to parents, January, 1794. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, *Dennie*, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

pursuit, as the inhabitants of Boston had begun to know his works, and had noted in his essays "a freshness and buoyancy of thought which, in combination with the classical expression of his century, had not characterized the work of any American essayist before him."<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

In this period, Dennie matured and gained experience. He quit his boyish ideas that the world and man were subservient to his personal wishes, and that the standards he had prescribed for himself were not as easily obtainable as he had once thought. As he said: "'Tis the disposition of the World, the Ass, to withhold benefit from those who want it, & give their sum of more to him, who has too much."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, he learned that integrity, honesty, and independence were his three most prominent characteristics, and that he could not exchange these for financial gain or world recognition. Dennie was becoming a man, and a gentleman, who knew more in what direction his future lay. Dennie gained the experiences in law, in lay reading, in conversations with Dr. Page, Vose, and Tyler, and in his continuing study of literature, that he would need in order to start his literary career. He enlarged his group of select acquaintances, he became more aware of his personal appearance, and he grew less tolerant of those who could not reach his standards of honesty, morality, and education. Dennie, in launching his literary career through his Farrago and Colon essays, was on the threshold of giving to the American public a knowledge and appreciation of classical literature, was beginning to revive the manner of the best in 18th century literature, and was striving to bring elegance to American belles-lettres.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to parents, Charlestown, January, 1794. Pedder, op. cit., p.143.

## THE THIRD PERIOD

This period was the climatic period in Dennie's life--one in which all his previous experiences and influences fused together to make him the type of man who could be called a defender of literary excellence. By this time, through the influences of his family background, a cultured home environment, the Revolutionary War, his acquaintance with Major James Swan, his friendship with Reverend Samuel West, Roger Vose, Timothy Bigelow, Dr. Page, and Royall Tyler, his education at Harvard, his law study at Grotton, his law practice at Charlestown, his lay readership at Claremont, and his literary recognition from the Farrago and Colin essays, Dennis had formed certain standards of living. In society, he surrounded himself with the cultured, the educated, the socially prominent persons in the communities in which he lived. He resided in the best boarding houses or homes of prominent persons. He acted and dressed like a gentleman of taste--a gentleman who wanted the very best in everything. As a "cavalier and aristocratic" gentleman in attitude, he shunned the common, mundane society; as an educated man, he felt disgust toward the "vulgar" speech and manner of the unlettered and uneducated "millions." As a man of many professions, he could readily talk with authority about clerks, counting houses, lawyers, and clergymen; as a Loyalist, he was a political conservative and a staunch supporter of the King and England. As a rising literary figure, he drew upon his knowledge of classical and 18th century English works to form the bases for his own writing--knowledge which soon formed the principal bases for his defense against contemporary American literature. As the man, Joseph Dennie, he could rely upon his knowledge that resulted from his past influences and experiences, which tempered with his independence of mind, integrity and fortitude, made him a man soon to become

an outstanding defender of literary excellence.

The first notice of Dennie's residence in Boston can be found in Thomas (Robert Treat) Paine's Federal Orrery, 23 February, 1795:

Messrs. Colon and Spondee request their brother haberdasher, T. P., to open an account with their 'Shop at the foot of the Green Mountain, and as their junior partner served the concluding years of his literary apprenticeship in the same warehouse of Apollo, clipped the tape of rhetoric with the same scissors, and handled the yardstick of sentiment behind the same counter, they doubt not his ready compliance with the credit you require.<sup>1</sup>

Paine, who had changed his name to Robert Treat Paine to avoid confusion with Thomas Paine, author of Common Sense, and Ags of Reason, was a strong Federalist, noted for his attacks on Boston Democratic Republicans, and his sensible theatrical criticisms. He received his degree from Harvard two years later than Dennie, then after working a short while in a mercantile house, had begun on 20 October, 1794, the publication of a semi-weekly newspaper, the Federal Orrery. From the start, it was exceptional for its literary quality. Little wonder, then, that Dennie again chose one of the best literary papers for publication of his work.

His contributions to the Orrery consisted mainly of satiric paragraphs. One was a particularly harsh satire on Harvard, which described the school as a center of dullness, and the others dealt with various subjects. On 9 March, 1795, Dennie tried his hand at theatrical criticism. It appears, however, that this was not his medium, and Dennie evidently abandoned this form of criticism. Evidence of this can be seen when Dennie was advised to write an opera or comedy to supplement his income. Each would bring him about £ 300. He declined, disclaiming all knowledge of the drama, and asserting his incapacity for the task. This is an insignificant part of his life, but an important point that illustrates one of his literary standards. He believed that good

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<sup>1</sup> Ellie, Dennie, p. 69.



literature could not be written by those who knew nothing about it, for if it were, it would be superficial, and at best, second-rate. This was a major criticism of American authors in Dennie's Port Folio--that American authors did not know the fundamentals of writing; therefore, they could not produce good literature. It also serves as still another example of Dennie's honesty in writing, and his belief that he could not exchange his ideals for financial gain.

His last direct contribution to the Oratory was the essay for 13 April, 1795. When he had contributed this, he intended to return to Charlestown to resume his law practice. However, he received word that his family's conditions in Lexington were quite poor. His father had become seriously ill, and his mother, herself ill, had to take over the family affairs. Because Dennie was fearful that their financial status would become enumbered, he remained in Boston. His parents had always given him money--a condition about which Dennie felt very guilty; by remaining in Boston, he hoped to relieve his parents of their always generous responsibility by capitalizing on his literary prowess. Dennie wrote to his mother upon his decision to remain in Boston:

. . . My grand object in visiting this metropolis was money. The way & means were Authorship. Two considerations remained. One to make that Authorship largely subservient to my interest--the other to secure to myself all the advantages arising from a literary project without any of its inconveniences, and to secure a stipend from town without its militating with my legal practice in the Country, but, on the contrary, to promote and extend that practice. . . . To increase that income (income from his Charlestown law practice) by every honest & decent expedient was my duty.

I sounded Paine<sup>1</sup> (Robert Treat) (,) Thomas,<sup>2</sup> & Russell,<sup>3</sup> but found only partial encouragement.<sup>4</sup>

Dennis was not content with just "partial encouragement"--he was eager for the recognition that he thought he should have, as evidenced by the praises from his Farrago readers. He exclaimed in the same letter that he had found his reputation had grown as a "sprightly writer and one enlisted on the side of the government." He was, he continued:

. . .carressed (sic) by most of those who possessed the greatest Genius Wealth & Power (and) the Gay were pleased with the vivacity & originality of the Farrago (and) the Aristocracy were pleased that the satire of Colon & Spence was levelled against the foes of Federalism.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Tablet

With his admirers' support and friends' assistance, Dennis laid plans for his first major publication--The Tablet. William Spotswood, a Boston book-seller and printer undertook the whole risk of furnishing paper types and labor in return for half the profit. An unidentified person, of whom Dennis said was "one of the correctest Scholars here,"<sup>6</sup> was to undertake the editorship. The Tablet was to be mainly a vehicle for his Farrago essays, of which he had already written seventy-five. He was under no obligation to remain in Boston, so he was free to return to Charlestown to continue his law practice. The subscription rate for The Tablet was to be \$3 per annum, with each quarter

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<sup>1</sup> Paine, although quite satisfied with Dennis's contributions as Colon, was in poor financial shape due to poor business management, so did not feel that he was able to accept further contributions.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah Thomas, publisher of the Massachusetts Spy, and Massachusetts Magazine.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Russell. Probably connected with the Eagle.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to mother, Boston, 24 April, 1795. Pedder, op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

to be paid in advance; hence, immediate profit could be realized from the first quarter. It was to be a weekly literary miscellany which was to be modeled upon the periodicals in which the Spectator and Tatler papers, and Samuel Johnson's Rambler and Idler had appeared. The Tablet, according to Dennie,<sup>1</sup> was intended for amusement, and would reject "uninteresting news & advertisements." Of this plan, Dennie said: "The Essays of Addison & Johnson were published in this manner, on a quarto page together (sic) with other matters--and shall I be ashamed to tread the path they have pursued."<sup>2</sup> The design of The Tablet was accordingly novel to the Bostonians, as this was to be solely a literary magazine. It was also novel in that unlike other magazine contributors and editors, Dennie's name was not to appear on its pages.

Dennie remained in Boston, probably as an associate editor, until mid-summer. On 18 May, 1795, the prospectus of The Tablet, probably written by him, appeared in the Orrery.

The Editors, gratified for a liberal and respectable subscription, and eager to begin the discharge of their public engagements, have anticipated the period of publication; and give a specimen of their work, on a much earlier day than Hope and Industry could have promised.<sup>3</sup>

"THE TABLET,--A Miscellaneous Paper, devoted to the Belles Lettres," appeared the following day, Tuesday, 19 May, 1795. Thirteen Farragos were then printed, of which seven were reprinted from the Morning Ray or Eagle. Some of these dealt with criticism, the study of mathematical science, and some were satires on subjects such as preventing the rise of geniuses, and the abuse of the word "Royal."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, Dennie, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

Other than the Farrago essays, another chief contribution was a series of criticisms on the English poet Churchill, by Reverend John Sylvester John Gardiner--a gentleman, who in the early stages of The Tablet encouraged and helped Dennie. There were also a few Colon and Spondee items, reprinted from the Eagle, a series of biographies of English orators and other prominent men, and essays signed Proteus (a pen name sometimes ascribed to Dennie, but his authorship is unlikely), and miscellanies.

Dennie returned to Charlestown in July, 1795, after finding, it seems, his brief residence in Boston a pleasant and prosperous one. A picture of his life at this time is described in Edmund Quincy's, Life of Josiah Quincy:

Mr. Dennie was a most charming companion, brilliant in conversation, fertile in allusion and quotation, abounding in wit, quick at repartee, and of only too jovial a disposition. My father used to tell of the gay dinners which celebrated the not infrequent visits Mr. Dennie made him when he was keeping house with his mother. On these white days he would summon the flower of the youth of Boston to enjoy the society of their versatile friend, and the festivity which set in at the sober hour of two would reach far into the night before the party were willing to break up.<sup>1</sup>

Dennie, filled with hopes of wealth and fame, wrote to his mother and Harriet Green, a relative who lived with the Dennies until Mrs. Dennie's death, of the success of The Tablet.

Nine of the principal (prominent clergymen) here are my subscribers, and they pronounce our work classical, pure and neat. We have respectable names daily sent us from the Country, and I am sanguine that this plan will be a useful stepping stone to professional success.<sup>2</sup>

How typical of Dennie to languish in the praise of the prominent, to be thrilled by "respectable" subscribers, and to revel in the criticism that The Tablet

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis, Dennie, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to mother and Harriet Green, Boston, 2 June, 1795. Pedder, op. cit., p. 149.



was deemed "classical." His standards in society and literature had certainly not diminished, but, instead, were growing stronger.

Dennie's enthusiasm for his first major work was not to last, however, for two years later The Tablet failed. That the failure of this was a great disappointment to Dennie cannot be denied--nor underestimated. Here was a man who had previously been praised for his literary style, and his taste in 18th century literature. His short oesays had reaped for him some portion of wealth and reputation; however, upon a large presentation of his work, he found that the majority of the public was not ready to accept his standards of writing, and so, he thought, was not sufficiently interested in the style of the masters. His "stepping stones" had crumbled, and he believed that his means for a literary career and best living were no longer available to him. As he said to his mother:

Returning in the summer of 1795, animated with expectation of realizing fortune and fame from the Tablet, I sat down to the desk of Composition, and was making extensive arrangements when an unexpected & mortifying billet from Spotswood announced the death of my child! I never felt the inconvenience of being poor and the anguish of disappointment, till then.<sup>1</sup>

Under the "anguish of disappointment," Dennie bitterly attacked the public for not appreciating "quality" in literature. He blamed The Tablet's failure on the waywardness of the times, the dullness of the Bostonians (this soon developed into the dullness of the whole nation), and the savage infancy of a country that had repressed his magazine's growth.<sup>2</sup> Here were Dennie's themes for his later criticism. His explanation of the "waywardness of the times" was forcefully alluded to in his Port Folio prospectus.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to mother, Walpole, 26 April, 1797. Pedder, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

(The waywardness of the times is) our indifference to elegant letters, to the acrimony of our party bickerings, and to the universal eagerness for political texts and their commentary. Hence it is generally, and not without reason supposed that amid such wild uproar the gentle voice of the Muse is scarcely audible.<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on the dullness of the Bostonians, he accused them of being tasteless and mercenary.<sup>2</sup>

Dennie's harshest criticism at this time was aimed at the "savage infancy" of the United States concerning its lack of interest in good literature and the inability to understand it. When Dennie's Tablet failed, his Farrago essays, which as stated above made up the main part of The Tablet, also failed. But rather than despair over his misfortune, Dennie started to lay future plans for the essays. This was the practical side of Dennie's character, for if he found that one thing ended in failure, he would seek to find success in another. Dennie decided to have the Farrago essays published in Europe, for as he bitterly commented "to imagine that a refined and classical style of writing will be encouraged here (the United States) is absurd. . . (for) rude and savage America does not reward literature."<sup>3</sup>

#### The Lay Preacher Essays

Although bitterly disappointed, Dennis, nevertheless, could not long remain so. He had moved to Walpole in early October, 1795, on the pretense of practicing law. However, other reasons have been attributed to this move. The first is that Roger Vose was a practicing lawyer there, which undoubtedly

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd V. Flewelling, Literary Criticism in American Magazines: 1783-1820. An unpublished dissertation. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1931, pp. 139-140.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Royall Tyler, Walpole, 2 October, 1795. Pedder, op. cit. p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to mother, Walpole, 26 April, 1797. Ibid., p. 158.

provided a stronger incentive to Dennie than his law practice, whose financial prospects in Walpole were even dimmer than those in Charlestown. Secondly, the New Hampshire Journal: or Farmer's Weekly Museum, a newspaper published by Isiah Thomas and David Carlisle, Jr., provided a medium for Dennie's literary work. The Museum, he determined, could provide a fresh start for him; it was a new "stepping stone." On 12 August, 1795, the first of a new series of essays, The Lay Preacher, made its appearance. Further evidence that Dennie moved to Walpole for other than law practice can be found in a later Lay Preacher essay, "Inconstancy," which appeared in The Farmer's Museum and Lay Preacher's Gazette. It also shows his still biting criticism toward American complacency in literature.

How a lawyer could be a poet and renounce his fees are still subjects of speculation. To exchange a Barrister's fame for that of an Orator, Historian, or Poet, is no, perhaps, unpardonable caprice. It is rather more difficult to write pure English than to draw the barbarous tautology of a declaration. However strange it may seem, it is as glorious to be a man of letters, as a mere Country-Attorney.--I mean in Great Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Dennie was well acquainted with the Museum, as five of his Farrago essays had been reprinted from the Eagle in 1793, 1794, and 1795, and in March, 1794,<sup>2</sup> Dennie had contributed the first of a series entitled The Saunterer, which thereafter was a product of many authors, chiefly Royall Tyler and John C. Chamberlain. It ran irregularly in the Museum until September, 1794.

Dennie's initial Lay Preacher essay was "Wine and New Wine,"<sup>3</sup> in which he announced that he was a "moral preacher," who would not "whine at (his readers)

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dennie and others, The Spirit of the Farmer's Museum and Lay Preacher's Gazette, Walpole, New Hampshire. Thomas and Thomas, by D. and T. Carlisle, 1801, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, Dennie, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix E.

from the pulpit," but yet would advise them to the modes of conduct in return for their "reformation." Surely Dennie was the man to do this, for not only had he had experience in the gayest of society, but also in the moral society of the clergy, the honest and dishonest society of lawyers, the professional society of business men, the societies of politicians, doctors, and literary men, and the society of the unlearned and the cultured, and also was honest in his advice. In trying to raise the level of social conduct, Dennie was indirectly trying to raise the standards of literature, for he believed I feel, that by the elevation of part of human nature, an appreciation of culture--particularly that of literature--would follow. In the Lay Preacher essay, "Design of the Preacher," which I assume followed shortly after his first essay, Dennie called himself the "pondering preacher," who would moralize upon the changing scenes of life more readily, profitably, and pleasantly than a "mere heedless pedestrian." He further stated that it had always been his desire to traverse the market places, the coffee-houses, the marts, and all the corners of the city, and then compose an essay which told of what he had seen and heard.<sup>1</sup> Here is a good example of Dennie's "indirect" method. Dennie's purpose is almost parallel to that of Addison's in the latter's Spectator: even the wording is too similar to be a chance coincidence, for as Addison states:

(My purpose is) to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality, (and to bring) philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-shops.<sup>2</sup>

By comparing the stated literary tenets of Addison, we see that he was one of Dennie's models for the Lay Preacher essays. By giving the public

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dennie, The Lay Preacher, John E. Hall (ed), Philadelphia: The Port Folio Office, 1817, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Addison, The Works of Joseph Addison. L.10 (12 March, 1711) 26. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1864.



essays based on one of the best examples of fine literature, Dennie hoped, in some small measure to alleviate the "waywardness of the times, and the savage infancy of the nation." Like Addison, Dennie ridiculed the prevailing social manners and morals of the day. Addison's subjects, however, are more diversified, and his essays, as a general rule, are longer. Where Addison would prefix his essays with a Latin verse and a translation or short verse, Dennie's Lay Preachers were prefixed with a Biblical phrase, a prefix method which Sterne used in the Yorick sermons. Moreover, Addison developed many of his essays in the form of letters addressed to Mr. Spectator and signed them with fictitious names such as James Easy, Anthony Gape, Tom Trippet, Cleanthes, Ralph, Francis Courtly, Celia, Hezekiah Broadbrim, Teraminta, Pucella, etc., or initials such as A.B., L., C.D., S.T., etc., while Dennie did not deviate from the essay pattern. On the whole, though, Dennie's style of writing is quite similar to that of Addison's as both used elevated, yet homely language, logical development of theme and structure, urbane humor, the gentle, but pointed persuasion, the easy fluency of words, and the use of the first person. There can be no mistake about Addison's influence and use as a source in Dennie's "sermons" when the Spectator and Lay Preacher are compared. Dennie defended this style of writing--particularly the use of the first person--by stating to his readers:

I hope that this style of speaking occasionally in the first person will be forgiven, even by the most fastidious reader when he adverts to the custom of my predecessors. A periodical writer can hardly avoid this sort of egotism, and it is surely very harmless when its employer muffles himself in the mantle of concealment and in the guise, whether of a shrewd Spectator or a simple Lay Preacher, walks unobtrusively abroad. Mr. Addison and Monsieur Montaigne perpetually indulge this habit; and on a very careful inspection of many editions of their essays, I have always found, by certain infallible marks, that those speculations had been most diligently perused which abound in little sketches of the manners, humours, and habits of their authors. We are naturally curious

thus to peep through the keyhole of a study, to see a writer in his elbow-chair, and to listen to his story with the fondness and familiarity of friendship. Anonymous authors have a prescription from Parnassus to paint themselves; and when by a Tatler, a Spectator, or a Connoisseur, nothing but good colours and modest tinting is employed, men look with mingled curiosity and complacency at the picture. In a speculation on the blessings derived from a studious temper, if a miniature of a lover of books is introduced, provided it be a tolerable resemblance and viewed in a proper light, it will, by an easy association, lead the observer to reflect more intensely upon the value of literature.<sup>1</sup>

The similarities of their styles, I believe, can be seen in the following excerpts from essays on the divisions in government and life. Although they approach the subject differently--as naturally they would have to do as different circumstances prevailed in each country--use different examples, the work of each shows the likeness in language, development, and manner of presentation.

The Lay Preacher  
XXXIV

"I hear that there be divisions among  
you, and I partly believe it."

In the social state obviously framed for the promotion of the common good, a credulous man might suppose that there would be no divisions. But this mistake, Observation, if she had only half an eye and peered with that through a glass darkly, would correct. Where only two or three are gathered together, some unsocial, malevolent passion will start up and forbid their unanimity. But in great and political bodies, among old and rival nations, opinions being as numerous as the individuals who harbor them, there the clash of faction and the clash of swords will be so often heard that there will be no room left to doubt 'divisions.'

I believe that I have, somewhere, hinted to my readers that a newspaper lies occasionally on my table. But I survey that weekly map of human life, more with the feelings of a moralist than of a politician, and shed tears rather than wine at the intelligence of a victory. If the public papers recorded the happy marriage

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<sup>1</sup> Dennie, The Lay Preacher, Hall, pp. 100-101.

and not the sudden death, if they painted the tranquility of a Federal and not the turbulence of a French government, every son of sensibility would peruse them with rapture. But, especially at this jarring period when our ears ring with 'the world's debate,' it is most painful to turn over pages which, crowded with recitals of battles, sieges, assassination, and slaughter, are nothing more than the records of animosity. The old world is rent in pieces by 'divisions.' Nothing but 'wars' and 'fightings' can satisfy the restlessness of France, the pride of England, and the stately ambition of Germany. In France there is jangling in the Cabinet as well as the shock of hostile lances in the field. How many wise and virtuous men have felt the edge of a Revolutionary ax because they differed in sentiment from a Revolutionary Tribunal. How many Britons have found untimely death in the dykes of Flanders, who might have been gathered like a shock of corn in his season, had not 'divisions' among the nations urged them far from peace and the plough. However men may talk of universal benevolence and the amiableness of the charities of life, yet we hear every day of division among them, and we are forced fully to believe it. In our own country, though the weapons of war are sheathed, yet 'division,' frequent and pernicious, like the tares and thorns in the parable, arise and mar the peace of the community. Among the borderers of Pennsylvania, 'Division' touched with a brand the head of the whisky-still, and the fiery spirits of insurgency blazed against a government the first and fairest on the earth. Division has been the president of many a 'club' and 'self-created society,' --Division, a scowling monster more ugly than the 'Green Dragon' whose den she was wont to haunt. Division has looked askance at the Treaty and has even with audacious front adventured to assail Washington, but he steadfastly smiled, and she vanished away.

Men disagree and divide in minute no less than in momentous questions. My parishoners inform me of various divisions, and I partly believe them. Thus I hear that two young girls of equal pretensions to wit and beauty cannot possibly, live in friendship together, for, like Caesar and Pompey of Lucon, one cannot bear a rival and the other is impatient of a superior. I hear that two neighboring shopkeepers will not even look at each other nor go to the same tavern, nor walk the same side of a street--all in consequence of an unlucky division. Two counties will content for years which shall enjoy the privilege of a shire and where the Courthouse shall stand, and thus cut out work for lawyers, even before a place is provided for them to wrangle in. Neighbors will squabble about an old tree and an old horse, and expend 100 dollars in court fees, to determine which shall have the mighty privilege of putting out the fire by piling on the wood of the one, and of having a neck broke by riding the other. But what is a more preposterous division than any enumerated is what is called an ecclesiastical dispute. To such an absurd height has this species of contentment been carried that, in spite of the opinion of the Saint that a believing wife may convert an infidel husband, church doors have been shut against a converted female for pairing with an unconverted



mate. Last of all, to end this disgusting catalogue of 'divisione,' Christians professing to worship in concert have pulled each other by the beard in ascertaining who should be their minister, and have warred furiously to know where the temple of peace should be erected.<sup>1</sup>

No. 125.) Tuesday, July 24, 1711

Ne, pueri, ne tanta animus assuescite  
bella,  
Neu patriae validas in viscera vertite  
vires.

Virg. *Æn.* vi. 832.

This thirst of kindred blood, my sons, detest,  
Nor turn your face against your country's breast.  
Dryden.

My worthy friend Sir Roger (Coverly), when we are talking of the malice of parties, very frequently tells us an accident that happened to him when he was a school-boy, which was at the time when the feuds ran high between the Round-heads and Cavaliers. This worthy knight, being then but a stripling, had occasion to inquire which was the way to St. Anne's Lane; upon which the person whom he spoke to, instead of answering his question, called him a young popish cur, and asked him who had made Anne a saint? The boy, being in some confusion, inquired of the next he met, which was the way to Anne's Lane; but was called a prick-eared cur for his pains, and instead of being shown the way, was told that she had been a saint before he was born, and would be one after he was hanged. 'Upon this,' says Sir Roger, 'I did not think to repeat the former questions, but going into every land of the neighbourhood, asked what they called the name of that lane?' By which ingenious artifice he found out the place he inquired after without giving offence to any party. Sir Roger generally closes this narrative with reflections of the mischief that parties do in the country, how they spoil a good neighbourhood, and make honest gentlemen hate one another; besides that they manifestly tend to the prejudice of the land-tax, and the destruction of the game.

There cannot a greater judgment befall a country than such a dreadful spirit of division as rends a government into two distinct people, and makes them greater strangers and more averse to one another, than if they were actually two different nations. The effects of such a division are pernicious to the last degree, not only with regard to those advantages which they give the common enemy, but to those private evils which they produce in

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dennie, *The Lay Preacher*, Milton Ellis (ed). New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1943, pp. 79-80.



the heart of almost every particular person. This influence is very fatal both to men's morals and their understanding; it sinks the virtue of a nation, and not only so, but destroys even common sense.

A furious party spirit, when it rages in its full violence, exerts itself in civil war and bloodshed; and when it is under its greatest restraints naturally breaks out in falsehood, detraction, calumny, and a partial administration of justice. In a word, it fills a nation with the spleen and rancour, and extinguishes all the seeds of good-nature, compassion, and humanity.

Plutarch say, very finely, 'that a man should not allow himself to hate even his enemies, because,' says he, 'if you indulge this passion in some occasions, it will rise of itself in others; if you hate your enemies, you will contract such a vicious habit of mind, as by degrees will break out upon those who are your friends, or those who are indifferent to you.' I might here observe how admirably this precept of morality (which derives the malignity of hatred from the passion itself, and not from its object) answers to that great rule which was dictated, to the world about a hundred years before this philosopher wrote; but instead of that, I shall only take notice, with a real grief or heart, that the minds of many good men among us appear soured with party-principles, and alienated from one another in such a manner, as seems to me altogether inconsistent with the dictates either of reason or religion. Zeal for the public cause is apt to breed passions in the hearts of virtuous persons, to which the regard of their own private interest would never have betrayed them.

If this party spirit has so ill an effect on our morals, it has likewise a very great one upon our judgments. We often hear a poor insipid paper or pamphlet oried up, and sometimes a noble piece depreciated, by those who are of a different principle than the author. One who is actuated by this spirit is almost under an incapacity of discerning either real blemishes or beauties. A man of merit in a different principle, is like an object seen in two different mediums, that appears crooked or broken, however straight and entire it may be in itself. For this reason there is scarce a person of any figure in England, who does not go by two contrary characters, as opposite to one another as light and darkness. Knowledge and learning suffer in a particular manner from this strange prejudice, which at present prevails amongst all ranks and degrees in the British nation. As men formerly became eminent in learned societies by their parts and acquisitions, they now distinguish themselves by the warmth, and violence with which they expose their respective parties. Books are valued upon the like considerations. As abusive, scurrilous style, passes for satire, and a dull scheme of party notions is called fine writing.

There is one piece of sophistry practised by both sides, and that is the taking of any scandalous story that has been ever whispered or invented of a private man, for a known undoubted truth, and raising suitable speculations upon it. Calumnies that have been never proved, or have been often refuted, are the ordinary postulatums of these infamous scribblers, upon which they proceed as upon first principles granted by all men, though in their hearts, they know they are false, or at best very doubtful. When they have laid these foundations of sourrility, it is no wonder that their superstructure is every way answerable to them. If this shameless practice of the present age endures much longer, praise and reproach will cease to be motives of action in good men.

There are certain periods of time in all governments when this inhuman spirit prevails. Italy was long torn to pieces by the Guelfes and Bibellines, and France by those who were for and against the league; but it is very unhappy for a man to be born in such a stormy and tempestuous season. It is the restless ambition of artful men that thus breaks a people into factions, and draws several well-meaning persons to their interest by a specious concern for their country. How many honest minds are filled with unoharitable and barbarous notions, out of their zeal for the public good? What cruelties and outrages would they not commit against men of an adverse party, whom they would honour and esteem, if, instead of considering them as they are represented, they knew them as they are? Thus are persons of the greatest probity seduced into shameful errors and prejudices, are made bad men even by that noblest of principles, the love of their country. I cannot here forbear mentioning the famous Spanish proverb, 'If there were neither fools nor knaves in the world, all people would be of one mind.'

For my own part I could heartily wish that all honest men would enter into an association, for the support of one another against the endeavours of those whom they ought to look upon as their common enemies, whatsoever side they may belong to. Were there such an honest body of neutral forces, we should never see the worst of men in great figures of life, because they are useful to a party; not the best unregarded, because they are above practising those methods which would be grateful to their faction. We should then single every criminal out of the herd, and hunt him down however formidable and overgrown he might appear; on the contrary, we should shelter distressed innocence, and defend virtue, however beset with contempt or ridicule, envy or defamation. In short, we should not any longer regard our fellow-subjects as Whigs or Tories, but should make the man of merit our friend, and the villain our enemy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Addison, op. cit., pp. 190-192.

Another source for Dennie's Lay Preacher was Lawrence Sterne's Sermons of Yorick--particularly in the style of punctuation. Dennie had formed his unusual punctuation early in life, as can be seen by his early letters, and the sprinkling of dots, dashes, uncapitalized sentences, brackets, inserted words, and inverted commas all speak strongly of Sterne's influence. Dennie was perhaps more humorous than Addison, and slightly less so than Sterne; it seems as if he had taken the median position between these two. Both Sterne's and Dennie's "sermons" are consistently polished and classically dignified; both employ the familiar second person "ye" and "thou" when addressing their readers, and both integrate within their essays Biblical phrases to support their views, or to provide transition between thoughts. Biblical phrases also prefixed both men's sermons and provided a clue as to the nature of the work.

One outstanding difference between their sermons is that Sterne's were fully developed and usually required twenty pages of text, while Dennie's at a maximum, required only three. Another difference is that it was Sterne's habit to plagiarize many of his ideas from notable clergymen such as Dr. Joseph Hall, the Bishop of Norwich, and Dr. Edward Young, Dean of Sarum. Sterne would also plagiarize himself by taking passages from one sermon and inserting them into another under a new title. Examples of this can be found in his sermons IV and XXVII, "Self Knowledge" and "The Abuses of Conscience," which both included the same paragraph on how mankind is deceived by conscience. Also, a passage in the sermon "Advantages of Christianity to the World" was modified to form the close of another sermon--untitled. Finally, half of his sermon, "Thirteenth of January" was borrowed from the sermon "The Ingratitude

of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

Of his plagiarism from others, Sterne, himself, wrote in Tristram Shandy: "For this sermon I shall be hanged,--for I have stolen the greater part of it. Doctor Paidaeines (Dr. John Ferriar) found me out."<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Dennie was quite original. Although he used Bible stories as bases for his "sermons," the latter were his own work. If he found nothing to write about, then he would not write. More than once did he apologize for not having a Lay Preacher ready for publication.

I shall never preach without at least two or three ideas in my mind, and as I live in an obscure corner of the world have only half a dozen books on my shelf, and see but very few faces, my readers must not be surprised if I manage my brain as a prudent farmer his field; be satisfied with its produce at one season and allow it to remain fallow at another. The little stock of prudence and knowledge of which I am owner is very much at the world's service, and when I can say anything new or useful I will do it cheerfully and employ my neighbor Carlisle's paper as my speaking trumpet. But when I am sick or stupid, I am resolved not to repeat myself or quote other men, merely for the sake of scribbling. Always in literature, and sometimes in life, originality is the one thing needful. I always seek for it as for hidden treasure, and when I fail to find this jewel of great price, miserable thoughts arise in my mind and muddy ink flows tardily from my pen.<sup>3</sup>

How subtle Dennie is, for in apologizing he is really attacking those authors who produce inferior literature, inferior because it is not original. How he felt about Sterne's plagiarism, I do not know, but he must have overlooked it because of Sterne's excellent quality of style which overshadowed his quantity of plagiarism. But to those writers whose works were the result of "muddy pens," ordinary thought, and inferior style, Dennie had no use.

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<sup>1</sup> Laurence Sterne, "The Sermons of Mr. Yorick," The Complete Works and Life of Laurence Sterne. Vol. 5. Wilbur C. Cross (ed). New York: The Clowess Society, 1904, pp. xliii-xliv.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. xxxvi.

<sup>3</sup> Dennie, "One thing is needful," The Lay Preacher. Milton Ellis (ed), p. 84.



This example also shows how Dennie lived by his standards, and did not merely "preach" about them, then forget them.

Another great influence on the Lay Preacher was Dennis's old tutor, Reverend Samuel West. In Dennis's Lay Preacher, "Interment of Saul," he relates that while studying with West whom he wished were "copied in everything but his nonconformity!"<sup>1</sup> he picked up one of his neglected sermons that "the eccentric prebendary of York might have bound. . . up with his own."<sup>2</sup> It was this sermon, Shandean in style, that Dennis says gave him his first hint as to the style of the Lay Preacher essays, "as it was a model of sass and sentiment in alliance."<sup>3</sup>

Still another influence was Dennis's own lay reading experience. From this he could secure Biblical verses and stories to base his essays upon. Dennis never pretended to snoreach upon the office of the regular clergy, but believed that through the moral doctrines and the literary excellence of Bible stories a popular and profitable series could be written. As Hall said, "On this hint he spoke and volunteered in a village as a Lay Preacher, without even 'the laying on the hands of the presbytery.'"<sup>4</sup>

Of a minor, yet relevant source, Dennis recalled that his grandmother used to read Bible stories to him when he was a young boy. He probably remembered many of these and incorporated them into the series.

With the writing of the Lay Preacher series, several points now became clear. Dennis had taken a major step forward in his attempt to revive the elegant style of outstanding English 18th century authors, such as Addison and

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis, "Interment of Saul," The Lay Preacher, Hall (ed), p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Preface, p. 96.

Sterne. Too, it may be clearly seen how some of the influences of Dennie's boyhood and youth were now making themselves manifest in his writings, and how his integrity prompted him to follow his standards in literature.

The criticisms in the essays can be roughly divided into two areas: politics, and the conditions and human characteristics which influence a way of life. Dennie, at this time, was not critical of his contemporaries, with the exception of Thomas Paine. He seems to have adopted Addison's point of view that a man's reputation could not be ridiculed or slandered, and that no man should be spoken of unless with honor.<sup>1</sup> Too, as previously pointed out, the subtlety with which Dennie used his criticism made the mention of names unnecessary. Of course, Dennie later changed this concurrence of view, but for now, he was more intent upon criticizing the environment of the nation rather than its citizens.

During the period in which he published his Lay Preachers, Dennie attacked the Democratic (Democratic Republican) party, Jeffersonian principles, Thomas Paine, and the precepts of democracy. As seen before, Dennie had been nurtured in a Federalist and Loyalist environment. His family, Samuel West, Thomas (Robert Treat) Paine, and other close friends were all Federalists. Before and after the Revolution, the Federalists upheld the British system of government, spoke loyally (many times in secrecy) of the King, and retained an aristocratic attitude. They distrusted the views of democracy that each man was equal, and that all men had a voice in the government. Equality was not for all, they argued, but for the few who could support the government financially, and the few who enjoyed the prominent positions in business and

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<sup>1</sup> Addison, op. cit., No. 262, Monday, December 31, 1711, pp. 378-379.

the social set. They also violently disagreed with the Democrats who condoned the excess of the French Revolution.

After the Revolution, the Federalist party was in power; however, in a few short years (1801), their power was overthrown when Thomas Jefferson became president. Before 1801, however, the Federalist felt the nation's change in sentiment, and in self-defense lashed out at Democratic principles. Dennie, a staunch Federalist and an aristocrat and British sympathizer in social and political attitudes respectively, was one of the leading Federalist critics. In his Lay Preachers he boldly asserted his political views, and proudly proclaimed himself as a member of the Federalist party.

As the Whig divines in 1775 were instrumental in destroying the old government, perhaps a Federal parson may offer some reasons against subverting the new.<sup>1</sup>

and again:

Very suddenly have most of our political fashions past (sic) away. Britain has been called a mother, a hag, a sister, or a friend. Our rulers are perpetually wrangling concerning the garb of government. Some from Geneva or Virginia, affect the broad mantle of republicanism, which covers a multitude of sins. Others prefer French manufactures of the Paris cut. A few, perhaps, wish to import materials from England, but there is a good warm, well-made, easy garment made to fit anyone, called Federalism, which the Lay Preacher actually prefers to his canonicals, and prays may be constantly worn, and a unchangeable mode.<sup>2</sup>

Like most Federalists, Dennie abhorred the idea of equality in government probably over all other Democratic ideas. His most violent outburst of this precept caused Dennie's contemporaries to call him a traitor to the government. This criticism was not loud nor long, however, and Dennie continued to bombard the idea of equality.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennie, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes," The Lay Preacher, Ellis (ed), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Dennie, "The fashion of this world passeth away," Ibid., p. 48.

. . . I learn that certain restless and perturbed spirits, under the plausible title of 'Democrats,' are labouring anxiously to teach proselytes the soothing doctrines of liberty and equality. Liberty such as the fish-women of Paris enjoyed when they treated a Queen of France like a prostitute of the stews; and Equality such as a Legendre and Santerre could boast when the butcher's stall of the one, and brewer's dray of the other, were, in a Revolutionary government, on a level with the throne. . . I am convinced that if the fantastic vision of 'Equality' could be realized. . . (W)e should be guilty of every species of outrage and excess. We should hear the voice of wild misrule, in darkness, and the mob that rageth, at noon day. . .<sup>1</sup>

On Thomas Paine, Dennie was the most violent of all in his criticisms. To him, Paine was "that infidel in religion and that visionary in politics," "an enemy to (the nation's) peace," and "deceitful." Paine's Age of Reason was "but a bungling vamp of obsolete infidelity written by a drunken author,"<sup>2</sup> rarely quoted except by the lowest vulgar. . .<sup>3</sup>

On the French Revolution, Dennie thought that the French citizens had "In a(n) evil hour. . . planted certain bastard slips, called tress of liberty"<sup>4</sup> and as a result "moral (has been) annihilated, religion made a jest . . . the immortality of the soul denied, and God blasphemed."<sup>5</sup>

More significant than Dennie's part in showing modern day readers the attitudes of the Federalists, was the effect that politics had on Dennie's later criticism of American authors--especially those on Joel Barlow and Phillip Freneau. Dennie, although it is quite evident that he believed their writing good, did not give their literary talents full credit simply because they were members of the Democratic party. He was particularly hard on Barlow as he was a friend and staunch supporter of Thomas Paine's political views.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennie, "In those days there was no king in Israel;. . ." The Lay Preacher, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., "Favor is deceitful," p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., "The fashion of this world passeth away," p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> Dennie, The Lay Preacher, Hall (ed), p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Dennie, The Farmer's Museum and Lay Preacher's Gazette, p. 66.



The second category for the remainder of the Lay Preacher essays is the criticism on manners, on the amusements of the day, on man's dress and behavior in public, and on the personality qualities of man--in short, the manners and environment of man in society. These criticisms, I believe, best show Dennie's own character. They point out his standards of society, the influences which have molded these standards, and how Dennie's own life is regulated by these standards. The best way to show these is to use the form of proverbs and axioms.

ON LIFE: Like April skiss, life is coquetish, capricious and changeable. Prosperity and adversity often succeed each other, like the vicissitudes of day and night.<sup>1</sup>

ON BOOKS: A book produces a delightful abstraction from the cares and sorrows of this world. They may press upon us, but when we are engrossed by study we do not acutely feel them. Nay, by the magic illusion of a fascinating author we are transported from the couch of anguish or the grip of indulgence to Milton's paradise or the elysium of Virgil.<sup>2</sup>

ON THE BOOK OF RUTH AND THE BOOK OF JOB: . . .the book of Ruth is a specimen of fine writing and of amiable morality, not often to be found.<sup>3</sup>

. . .The book of Job is unquestionably the most pathetic, sublime and beautiful. The dialogue is in the noblest style of composition, and the interlocutors are all remarkable for character, manners, and sentiment. . .and the moral such as must challenge the . . .every virtuous mind.<sup>4</sup>

ON THE CLERGY: On some of those days when I do not preach myself, I sit down in the body seat of the first meeting house that I find. Occasionally I am instructed by a ingenious sermon, modelled by a 'workman that needeth not be ashamed,' but when the clergyman is corpulent,

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<sup>1</sup> Dennie, The Lay Preacher, John E. Hall (ed), p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

red faced, and a heavy leaner upon the cushion, when he sounds divinity through his nose, when he copies the huge pages of Dr. Gill, a Flavel, and reads them without emphasis, though I cannot discern long ears rising out of each side of his wig, I am confident that some 'strong ass' has mistaken the pulpit for a stable.<sup>1</sup>

The latter shows Dennie's disdain for the man who does not set himself as an example for others to follow--particularly in appearance. Dennie believed that the clergy should, most of all men, be immaculate in dress, as well as in soul. He is also criticizing the lack of sense to be original, to discover the pleasures of good literature, and to present such to other people.

ON POOR LAWYERS: What aileth thee, O Lawyer, that after having drawn ten thousand pounds from the purses of thy omdoled olients, thou still must play thy saving and cheating game? In thy old age, when thou seest in thy coffers the rewards of thy hard and spider-like industry, canst thou still be unsatisfied and wish to make more writ against innocent defendants? What is thy object? Is it wealth? You have a fortune. Is it reputation? What fame is it to bellow in support of thy declaration, which will soon be forgotten with the causes thy supported? Believe me, you have (sic) better write one page of history, couple or two feeble lines of rhyme, or utter one moment's melodious breath than to defend right and wrong as you do, without discrimination. For shame, is it not enough to have the silly vanity of tickling rural jurors' ears in your youth, but you must omdound them in your middle age, and persevere in duping them in the decline of life? Hasten and make amends; the night of repentance is coming on, and it will be a night of thick and Egyptian darkness to thee.<sup>2</sup>

ON INDOLENCE: But there exists in some individuals an ill habit of mind, a sickness of the heart, a lameness of spirit, diseases more difficult to cure than cancer, fever, or gout. A good-natured patient, swallowing his physician's prescription, may become free of a sick room and walk at large with health's reddest roses blooming on his cheek.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennie, The Lay Preacher, Ellis (ed), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Dennie, "What aileth thee?" The Lay Preacher, Ellis (ed), p. 28.

But a man of morbid anxiety, fretfulness, ambition, or avarice will send in vain for the healing drug of the apothecary. . . . Blessed with birth, with talents, with family, with favor, have not I a privilege to inquire of him with more than common curiosity, 'What aileth thee?'<sup>1</sup>

ON MODERATION: Young man, I say unto thee, walk gently to riches, to honours, to pleasure. Do not run. Observe the impatient racer. He is breathless; he is fallen; bemired and beluted like Dr. Slop; overthrown by Obadiah; he is distanced; he is hissed. Walk circumspectly. . . . not like a fool but like a philosopher.<sup>2</sup>

ON FRETFULNESS: Of all vile habits, that of fretfulness is the least tolerable. . . . fretfulness is a kind of perpetual motion, excited no less by a creaking door than a fit of the gout. It is a voracious monster and feeds upon minute as well as vast vexation.<sup>3</sup>

ON HOSPITALITY: Her language is kind, not formal; her gestures are few but expressive. In the bad days of this stormy world, it is she who cherishes with the warm garment and warmer welcome. . . . Like the tender host of the Levite, she will make your hearts merry with her cordial wine; she will feed even the dog that follows ye. She will speak peace to the houseless wayfarer. . . .<sup>4</sup>

ON WOMEN: . . . attention to women honours both the giver and receiver. Nothing is to be gained by rudeness to the sex. By complaisance to them, much may be required. He who is universally decried by women is rarely very popular in male society. Nature intended the two sexes should live in amity. Let the good understanding continue. If we treat our female friends with courtesy and with tenderness, if we listen to their voice with attention, bow at their approach, and sigh at their departure, we shall be liberally remunerated. . . . Women, naturally frank, generous, and sensitive, will hasten to discharge the obligation. On him who is thus watchful to please her she will smile with radiance, she will smooth his pillow, she will, like Hotspur's consort, 'sing the song that pleases him,' and 'bind his aching head with flowers.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis, The Lay Preacher, Hall (ed), p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

Although Dennie never married, he was no stranger to the ladies, as he enjoyed their company a great deal--especially in Groton and Charlestown.

Dennie's mother was to him that which he described above, however.

ON CLEANLINESS: It involves much. It supposes a love or order, an attention to the laws of custom, and a decent pride. . . Of a well-dressed man it may be affirmed that he has a sure passport through the realms of civility. In the first interviews we can judge of no one, except from appearances. He, therefore, whose exterior is agreeable begins well in any society.<sup>1</sup>

ON FALSENESS OF CULTURE: Parents may dress, and school-masters prune as much as they please; all culture is in vain where there is rottenness at root and heart.<sup>2</sup>

ON POLITENESS: True politeness, unlike that of men of the mode, consists in actually rendering little services to our neighbor, rather than in the ostentatious promise of great ones. Indifferent to its own ease, it thinks much of another's, discerns the latent wish, and supercedes the necessity of asking favors by seasonably bestowing them.<sup>3</sup>

It was the parables, the ease of fluency, and the advice, as above, that the "pondering preacher" gave to his readers that made the Lay Preacher Dennie's most well-known and remembered work.

Besides his Lay Preachers, Dennie also contributed to the Museum items called "Literary Intelligence" and other political satires which attacked the Democrats. Dennie practically conducted the paper's literary and political departments after October, 1795, as attested to in a letter to his mother: "Soon I will send you the Walpole paper, in a series. I have conducted it, others say with propriety (sic), for nearly a twelve month."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Dennie, "and she made haste, and let . . .", The Lay Preacher, Ellis (ed), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to mother and Harriet Green, Walpole, 29 August, 1796, Pedder, op. cit., pp. 153-154.



### Editor of the Museum

He finally became editor in 1796, when Isiah Thomas gave up his partnership to Carlisle. The Museum flourished under Dennie's management. It had 2,000 readers, a circulation larger than any other village paper in the United States; it was subscribed to in all states (there were sixteen at the time) except three; and had some of the most prominent American writers for contributors: Jeremiah Mason, Royall Tyler, John C. Chamberlain, Thomas Green Fessenden, Samuel Hunt, J.S.J. Gardiner, Jeremiah Smith, Lewis R. Morris, James Elliot, William Bigelow, Isaac Story, and Doctor Elihu Hubbard Smith (one of the Hartford wits).

Dennie was still practicing law, but his interest in it was definitely becoming less and less. As Edmund Quincy related:

One day one client strayed in, but the interruption he caused to the leisure and favorite occupation of his counsel learned in law was so great that a repetition of the annoyance was carefully guarded against. Mr. Dennie thenceforth kept his office-door locked on the inside.<sup>1</sup>

His attention to his literary pursuits increased. Not only was he the editor, but was still contributing regularly to it, and had, with Tyler, reopened the Shop of Colon and Spondee in order to supply the Museum with a series of political essays called The Runner or Indian Talk. Dennie, too, at this time, was finally enjoying the financial prosperity which he had so long sought. He was realizing that standard of living which he had thought best. As Joseph Buckingham, a noted printer and editor, then an apprentice to Carlisle, described Dennie:

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Quincy, Life of Josiah Quincy, as quoted by Ellis, Dennie, p. 87.

I have a vivid recollection of Dennie's personal appearance, in 1796, when I began my apprenticeship in the printing office of David Carlisle. In person he was rather below than above the middle height, and was of a slender frame. He was particularly attentive to his dress, which, when he appeared in the street on a pleasant day, approached the highest notch of the fashion. I remember, one delightful morning in May, he came into the office dressed in a pea-green coat, white vest, nankin small-clothes, white silk stockings, and shoes, or pumps, fastened with silver buckles, which covered at least half the foot from the instep to the toe. His small-clothes were tied at the knees, with ribbons of the same color, in double bows, the ends reaching down to the ankles. He had just emerged from the barber's shop. His hair, in front, was well loaded with pomatum, frizzled, or craped, and powdered; the ear-locks had undergone the same process; behind, his natural hair was augmented by the addition of a large queue (called vulgarly, the false tail), which, enrolled in some yards of black ribbon, reached half-way down his back. Thus accommodated, the Lay Preacher stands before my mind's eye. . . .<sup>1</sup>

That Dennie should dress in the height of fashion is not at all surprising, considering his gentlemanly attitude. More important, though, Dennie thought that if a literary man did not dress well, he would doubt "the delicacy of his taste and the accuracy of his judgment," and "conclude there was some obliquity in his mind, a dull sense of decorum, and a disregard of order."<sup>2</sup>

Buckingham then goes on to relate Dennie's working conditions, part of the time, and his relationship with his fellow workers:

Among his familiar acquaintances, and in the company of literary men, Dennie must have been a delightful and fascinating companion. In the printing office, his conversation with the apprentices was pleasant and instructive. His deportment toward them was marked with great urbanity and gentleness. Being the younger apprentice,--in vulgar phrase, the printer's devil,--it was my lot to call upon him for copy, and carry the proof to him. Thus, for seven or eight months, my intercourse with him was almost daily, and was as familiar as propriety would sanction between an editor and an apprentice. I never saw him otherwise than in good humor.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph H. Buckingham, Specimens of Newspaper Literature, Vol. II, Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1860, p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Dennie, The Lay Preacher, Hall, (ed), p. 142.

Dennie wrote with great rapidity, and generally postponed his task until he was called upon for copy. It was frequently necessary to go to his office, and it was not uncommon to find him in bed at a late hour in the morning. His copy was often given out in small portions, a paragraph or two at a time; sometimes it was written in the printing office, while the compositor was waiting to put it in type. One of the best of his lay sermons was written at the village tavern, directly opposite to the office in a chamber where he and his friends were amusing themselves with cards. It was delivered to me by piecemeal, at four or five different times. If he happened to be engaged in a game when I applied for copy, he would ask some one to play his hand for him while he could give the devil his due. When I called for the closing paragraph of the sermon, he said, 'Call again in five minutes.' 'No,' said Tyler, 'I'll write the improvement for you.' He accordingly wrote the concluding paragraph, and Dennie never saw it till it was put in print.<sup>1</sup>

Through Buckingham's description of Dennie as the editor of the Museum, it is easy to see why the paper flourished as it did.

Dennie. . . was not merely the responsible editor, but was the enlivening spirit, around which the others congregated, and to which they made their obeisance as the sheaves of Jacob's sons, of old, did to the sheaf of Joseph. The selected articles were of his choosing. He gathered the exotics, and his criticism stamped them as genuine products of the garden of genius. The weekly summary of 'Incidents Abroad' and 'Incidents at Home' (compressed statements of foreign and domestic occurrences) which was not the least attractive feature of the Museum, was prepared by him; and though the feature of the Museum has had many imitators, I know of none, which can claim any near relationship or striking resemblance.<sup>2</sup>

Dennie's purpose for the Museum should have alone provided a clue as to the forthcoming success of the paper; it also shows his continuing efforts to bring the best in literature to the American public.

He (Dennie) will make it his care to procure the best written pamphlets on 'the transient topic of the times,' European magazines and reviews, and, in general, such books as will furnish him with extracts curious and novel. Every thing, that will promote the substantial interests of the yeomanry, everything, that will amuse the imagination, enrich the head, or improve the heart, shall ever hold a front place in the Farmer's Museum.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 196-197.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

During the latter part of 1798, however, Dennie's attention was directed toward other matters, and the Museum began to decline. In its declining status, however, one thing stands out. In 1799, the Museum's name was changed to the Farmer's Museum, or Lay Preacher's Gazette,<sup>1</sup> and included a series of American biographies, and criticisms. Even though only one criticism was undertaken, Dennie took a major step forward in criticism. He could now control, as editor, his writing for the first time, and proceeded to attack the American public through various essays for its literary complacency which promoted and substantiated the inferior literature which was being written by American authors. Dennie's attitude is expressed quite well in the following metaphorical excerpt from one of his editorials.

It has fared with the poet of the United States, as it has with the manufacturer of clothes; each has found a plenty of raw materials, each has made good homespun ware, and each has failed in raising that fine nap, and giving that brilliant colour to their manufactures, which strike the eye of people of fashion. As we may, without vanity, be presumed to be at the top of our trade, we have thought it our especial duty to examine, critically and scientifically, the most modish, literary manufactures of Europe, to discover the causes of their tawdry superiority; and to avail ourselves of our discoveries, for the benefit of the fine writers, as manufacturers of our own country. . .

In our opinion, one of the principal causes of the fashionable superiority of poetry, woven in European looms, is the judicious use of epithets. These should be gorgeous, splendid, far fetched, and ornubulous; that is to say, almost unintelligible. The fault of the American Parnasian weaver is, that he makes both warp and filling of strong, plain, good sense, when the stuff will find a much readier market, if he will merely warp with sense, and fill with epithet. Doubtless, there is now on hand many a durable piece of American stuff, which would command a ready

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<sup>1</sup> Announcement of the Museum and Lay Preacher's Gazette: "Being a judicious selection of the fugitive and valuable productions, which have occasionally appeared in that paper, since the commencement of its establishment. Consisting of a part of the essays of the Lay Preacher, Colon and Spandee, American biography, the choicest efforts of the American muse, pieces of Chaete humour, the easy essays of the Hermit, the most valuable part of the Weekly summaries, nuts, epigrams, and epitaphs, sonnets, criticism, etc., etc." Ellis, Dennie, p. 149.



market, if tamboured with choice epithets after the manner of those ingenious wearers, Mrs. Charlotte Smith, Della Crusoe, and Anna Matilda.<sup>1</sup>

and again:

Every man, unless tumid with the most ridiculous pride and confidence in American genius and literature, must be sensible from the newness of our country, from the deficiencies of our seminaries, from the comparative paucity of books, and from the almost total want of patronage, that many literary articles can be furnished in perfection, only from Europe. . . The silly vanity of a self-complacent American may be wounded at this blunt, but notorious truth. Let him deny it if he can.<sup>2</sup>

That Dennie was not the only editor to feel this way is illustrated quite well in Flewelling's Literary Criticism in American Magazines. Quoting from such contemporary magazines of the Museum as the Monthly Magazine, The Literary Magazine and American Register, and Monthly Anthology, he shows that it is quite evident that editors, if not all subscribers, were perfectly aware that the American works were not on a level with the European. Not all editors agreed, of course, but these usually only praised local writers, or relatives who had taken up a literary profession. The difference between Dennie and the others was that he criticized more vehemently and more often. Through the Museum, Dennie was continuing to lay his foundations as a defender of literary excellence.

#### Dennie in Politics

In February, 1798, Isaiah Thomas took over the management of the Museum again. The paper was swiftly going down hill as a result of a large number of delinquent subscribers. Then in June of the same year, Alexander Thomas

<sup>1</sup> Dennie (ed), Farmer's Museum and Lay Preacher's Gazette. Walpole, N.H., p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> Dennie (ed), Farmer's Museum. Feb. 18, 1799, as quoted by Flewelling, op. cit., p. 135.

relieved his father of the management. Dennie was still retained, but only as editor of the literary and political departments. Dissatisfied, Dennie began to seek other pastures. Having succeeded partially as a writer, mainly through the Lay Preacher essays, and having been as he said, "slowly and silently. . . fixing the basis of future character,"<sup>1</sup> Dennie sought to enter the field of politics, as he believed his reputation as a writer and as an editor would help to secure for him, a governmental position. Accordingly, his name was put on the Walpole ballot for Representative to Congress, but he lost the election as he said by being pitted against an incumbent candidate, and by being too young and inexperienced. His candidacy was not taken very seriously by the voters; in fact, he received only six votes as compared to the winner's one hundred and twenty-four, and placed sixth in balloting out of seven candidates. Dennie believed his loss was still another example of the public's indifference, and disgustedly wrote his mother that "I was disgusted with the levity and weakness of the people, and concluded, I believe very soundly, that promotion from them would be given very late, if given at all."<sup>2</sup> Here, I believe Dennie was referring not only to his defeat in politics, but was also remembering his sad experience with the Tablet.

His next attempt to enter politics was through the administration's favor. He had wished for this as early as 1796 when he expressed the hope that he would be chosen as Secretary to the Court of London.<sup>3</sup> However, as he was not, he turned his full attentions to the editorship of the Museum and collected his Lay Preachers for publication. It would be interesting to

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to mother and Harriet Green, 6 September, 1799. Pedder, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to mother and Harriet Green, Walpole, 29 August, 1796. Pedder, ibid., p. 154.

speculate what would have happened to his literary career if he had received this appointment.

That Dennie was well known for his political sentiments cannot be denied. Through his anti-Democratic attacks, he had earned the reputation as being "the erudite Walpole Fire-brand,"<sup>1</sup> and was classed with such prominent Federalist editors as John Pownall, Noah Webster, Benjamin Russell, Caleb P. Wayne, and Silliam Cobbett ("Peter Porcupine"). Dennie was criticized soundly by the Democratic supporters; an example of this is the following parody on Shakespeare's *Apotheosis in Romeo and Juliet*, entitled *Retaliation, or the Editor*. This is rather an ironic type of way in which he was criticized, as Dennie soundly denounced this type of imitation.

I do remember well a fed'ralist,  
And he in Walpole dwells, whom late I noted,  
With bloated cheek, red nose, and fiery eyes,  
Coining fell despotism. . .  
Noting this lordling, to myself I said,  
If love of England, monarchy, or gold,  
Could bribe a native to betray his country,  
There sits a pampered wretch would sell her to him.<sup>2</sup>

During Dennie's search for a political position, he was offered several editorships in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Halifax. The offer from Boston is quite interesting, as it shows Dennie's loyalty to his beliefs, and his independency of spirit. The Independent Chronicle, a one-time Democratic newspaper that had soundly criticized Dennie's political views had been purchased by a Federalist friend, James White, who offered Dennie an editor's job at a salary of \$1,200--more than Dennie had ever received.

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<sup>1</sup> Buckingham, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> Independent Chronicle, 11 December, 1797, as quoted by Ellis, Dennie, p. 107.

However, Dennis declined the position, saying:

I was really sorry that I could not assist Mr. White. But it was absolutely impossible, even if I had not received my appointment (a political appointment), unless, which would have been destructive to his interest, he had wholly changed the politics of the Chronicle. If he had allowed me 12 millions of dollars annually, I must have refused the offer. It would have belied my feelings, my habits, my principles, my conscience.<sup>1</sup>

Dennis's ambition for a political career had been realized at the time of the above writing, as he had been offered the job of private secretary to Thomas Pickering, Secretary of State in Philadelphia, then the capital of the United States. Besides his eagerness for the position, several other things prompted his acceptance. William Cobbett had offered to publish his Lay Preacher in Philadelphia, and had offered him \$1,000 for the copyright.<sup>2</sup> Cobbett was, perhaps, most like Dennis in character than any other friend or business acquaintance. Though born<sup>3</sup> of a poor farming family, Cobbett attained a height of independence little paralleled by any of Dennis's friends. Cobbett supported himself from childhood: his first job was "driving the small birds from the turnip seed, and the rooks from the peas" in his father's garden in Farnham in Surrey, his childhood home. At the age of eleven, Cobbett left home to find a job as a gardener in the Bishop of Winchester's gardens at the Castle of Farnham. At sixteen, he enlisted in the English navy-- a career which he cherished above all else. Although Cobbett had little formal schooling, he soon found time during the time of his enlistment to teach

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to mother and Harriot Green, 6 September, 1799. Pedder, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> William Cobbett, The Autobiography of William Cobbett, William Reitzel (ed), London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1933. Note 1, p. 239. Cobbett himself lists his birthdate as March 1799, but his son, John lists it as 1762, and E. I. Carlyle concluded that it was 1763.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



himself the fundamentals of English grammar, to improve his reading and writing, and to furnish himself with vast amounts of reading material. He soon put his self-taught knowledge to work in the navy as he was commissioned to write up all his company's reports, papers, orders, briefs, and accounts. He was soon promoted to sergeant-major over a number of men who had been in the service much longer than he, but as Cobbett reported, these men did not seem to mind, as they knew that they could not possibly do the paper work which his promotion entailed. The men also respected him, as his honesty, independence, and industry made him a capable leader of men. It is reported that he would often times rise early in the mornings, prepare and finish company reports, and be ready for morning inspection along with the rest of the camp. He left the navy over an unfortunate affair in which he was blasphemed by many of his uneducated superiors for trying to get a pay raise for the common sailor, and sailed in 1792 for France. It was during his residence in France that he based his dislike for the governmental policies of equality and republicanism. Strained conditions between England and France induced Cobbett to come to America in 1792. He lived at Wilmington, Pennsylvania, some twenty miles from Philadelphia. During his residence in the United States he was employed as a tutor in French and a political pamphleteer. It was this latter profession for which he is best known, and as he, himself, said:

From (that) time (the summer of 1794) to the year 1800 my labours were without intermission. During that space there were published from my pen about twenty different pamphlets, the whole number of which amounted to more than half a million copies. During the three last years, a daily paper, surpassing in extent of numbers, any ever known in America, was the vehicle of my efforts; and (by) the year 1800, I might safely have asserted, that there was not in the whole country, one single family, in which some part or the other of my writings had not been read;

and in which, generally speaking, they had not produced some degree of effect favourable to the interests of my country (England).<sup>1</sup>

Cobbett was violently pro-British, and upon every occasion where needed, he defended English life and government. Examples of his loyalty to England could be seen by his habit of exhibiting the pictures of past and present English princes, princesses, kings, queens, lords, dukes, etc. in his bookshop; "such a sight had not been seen in Philadelphia for twenty years."<sup>2</sup>

In March, 1797, he began the publication of a daily Federalist and pro-British paper, Porcupine's Gazette and United States Daily Register. For some years he had written under the name of "Peter Porcupine," an apt name when one considers the pointed thrusts Cobbett made toward the enemies of England. For three years, he carried the free utterance of the press to its full extreme in his paper, and earned many enemies as a result of his often out-spoken attacks. Then in 1799, he attacked the bleeding practices of Doctor Rush, was consequently sued by the doctor as Cobbett had, for one thing, accused him of "killing" General Washington by unnecessary bleeding, and was forced to pay \$5,000 to Rush at the closure of the case in 1799. Cobbett had incurred some debts before this law case; thus with the payments of his debts plus the money to Rush, Cobbett found himself financially poor. This condition resulted in his removal to England where he was to spend the rest of his life. Here, then, was a man who was industrious, vigorously independent, and unmoved in his criticisms of those things he thought unjust and wrong. He was anti-French and pro-Federalist. He was an Englishman. With these characteristics, attitudes, and citizenship, it is little wonder that Dennis eagerly looked forward

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

to Cobbett's literary assistance while the latter was in the United States.

Another inducement for Dennie's residence in Philadelphia was John Ward Fenno's offer of the editorship of the Gazette of the United States, one of the important papers in Philadelphia. Even though Dennie did not accept the position at this time, he knew that his contributions to the paper would be published.<sup>1</sup> Dennie, then, assured with promises for success, left Walpole in September after fulfilling his obligations to the Museum.

In Philadelphia, he soon made himself known as he started writing a series of essays called The Lecturer for The Guardian; or New Brunswick Advertiser, a Federalist newspaper. The series, signed "Orlando" was discontinued, however, after only four or five issues.

In late October, Dennie started contributing new Lay Preachers to the Gazette. Soon, several of his old "sermons" began to appear also. Both were favorably received; and Dennie was pleased with the intellectual environment of Philadelphia. (This feeling was not to last long, however.)

Philadelphia, in 1800, gave him many reasons to favor it. It was the largest city in the nation, and by far the most advanced as it was the center of national communications, manufacturing, and had as citizens such prominent men as Franklin, Rittenhouse, Dr. Rush, Charles Brookden Brown, Philip Freneau, Mathew Carey, Thomas Paine, Robert Morris, and Jared Ingersoll. As the nation's capital, it was thoroughly invested with a cosmopolitan atmosphere which was paralleled by the finest social, intellectual and literary circles--a startling difference from the little village of Walpole.

Dennie enjoyed his political position as it enabled him to meet the prominent politicians, both American and foreign, thus enhancing his social

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to parents, 6 September, 1799. Pedder, op. cit., p. 175.

position, and it also enabled him to give impetus to his political beliefs by virtue of his association with both Federalist and Democratic personages.

As he said:

I fairly and honourably by my own spirit and by my own exertions, without patronage of friends, as the cant of this world miscalls them, and without servility and sacrifices of my own, rose from the mud and dust of village obscurity to my present situation.<sup>1</sup>

His present situation was not much different, however, from his previous life. He still retained the same feelings and the same standards. He still sought the best in society; and he still sought recognition as a writer. On the latter point, Dennie had become quite discouraged as he felt that he was a failure as an author. Perhaps he had reason, for out of all his literary ventures, only one, the Lay Preacher, had brought him the recognition he thought he deserved.

Dennie attempted four major literary publications during the years 1799 and 1800, but they all failed due to the lack of subscribers, with the exception of one. His first attempt was announced in the Gazette on 26 December, 1799.<sup>2</sup> It stated that the paper would be enlarged and revised--an edition auxiliary "to sound principles," which would be edited by Oliver Oldschool, Esq., Dennie's most famous pen name which seems to express his attitudes--established literary forms, social conventions, and political ideas. However, this plan did not succeed due to the lack of subscribers. Then the proposal of William Cobbett's to publish a long-desired edition of the Lay Preacher did not materialize, as a result of Cobbett's law suit with Dr. Rush. As mentioned earlier, Cobbett had to pay Rush \$5,000 which resulted in Cobbett's need to

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to parents, 20 May, 1800. Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to mother and Harriot Green, 6 September, 1799. Ibid., p. 175.



relinquish his printing and book-selling office in order to pay the necessary sum. Dennie had entertained high hopes for this literary venture, as he proposed to dedicate his book to President Adams.<sup>1</sup> Though terribly disappointed about this failure, Dennie later defended Cobbett's accusations against Rush. Again in 1799, the Gazette announced Dennie's intention to publish a liberal translation of the works of Sallust, the Roman historian.<sup>2</sup> He proposed to have this work published by Strahan, Cadell and Davis, booksellers in London "since the Americans were too much engrossed with other affairs to study 'the beautiful reliques of ancient wisdom.'"<sup>3</sup> Evidently this too failed, as no further mention is made of the plan.

On the 27th of May, the Gazette announced the proposal for another work--The Farrago, or Essays Gay and Grave, to be published by Asbury Dickins. Again, however, the subscription list was not sufficiently filled, so the project was not carried out. It is little wonder then that Dennie blamed the failures on the American public's indifference toward good literature, and praised the English appreciation of the same. As he wrote to his parents:

Had not the Revolution happened; had I continued a subject to the King, had I been fortunately born in England or resided in the City of London for the last 7 years, my fame would have been enhanced and as to fortune I feel a moral certainty that I should have acquired by my writings 3 or 4 thousand pounds. But, in this Republic this region covered with the Jewish and canting and cheating descendants of those men, who during the reign of a Stuart,<sup>4</sup> fled away from the claims of the Creditor, from the tithes of the Church, from their allegiance to their Sovereign and from their duty to their God, what can men of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Gazette of the United States, 29 March, 1800, as quoted by Ellis, Dennis, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, Dennie, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> James I (1603-1625) and Charles I (1625-1649).

liberality and letters expect but such polarity treatment, as I have experienced? . . .<sup>1</sup>

Dennie was also feeling the pressures of the rising Democratic party. Pickering had been relieved from his job, and Dennie was anxious about his own political future, even though he had been asked to continue in his present position.

His fortunes soon began to look better, however, as in June, he became editor of the Gazette of the United States' literary department. The announcement of this stated that the new editor would take great care "to procure (the) insertion of paper and paragraph auxiliary to Government, Morals, and Learning."<sup>2</sup> Dennie remained the Gazette's literary editor for a year during which the Lay Preacher and Colon and Spondee essays were printed.

In the summer of 1800, there anonymously appeared in New York a little-known political pamphlet of sixty pages: Desultory Reflections of the New Political Aspects of Public Affairs in the United States of America since the Beginning of the Year 1799.<sup>3</sup> Though it has been ascribed to various authors, it had all the earmarks of Dennie's style, beginning with the motto "Keep Watch! Make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily," which is reminiscent of his Lay Preacher essays. It also had Dennie's elevated language style and his oft-expressed political sentiments. If it was Dennie's, as Milton Ellis believes it was, then Dennie's literary interests were greatly increasing in area.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to parents, 20 May, 1800. Pedder, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Gazette of the United States, 20 June, 1800, as quoted by Ellis, Dennie, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, Dennie, p. 131.

### The Port Folio

On 16 October, 1800, the Gazette announced a proposed new magazine to be published by Asbury Dickins and Dennie, which would be "conducted in an extensive and liberal plan, combining in the manner of the Tatler, politics with essays and disquisitions on topics scientific, moral, humorous, and literary under the title of the Port Folio."<sup>1</sup> Little did Dennie know then, that this magazine was to be the culmination of all his past experiences and influences, and that it would bring fame to him as a critic and as a defender of literary excellence.

The time appeared ripe for the publication of a new magazine as between 1799 and 1800, all other magazines, with the exception of two minor ones, the Philadelphia Magazine and Review, and the Ladies' Museum, had been discontinued. Ten magazines across the nation had been offered to the public, but not one had been continued: seven had been abandoned before thirteen months had passed.<sup>2</sup> The nation was eager for a new and good magazine. There were also young talents who wished to find a vehicle for their wares, as well as older authors who wished to find a new magazine in which to contribute their works. Among these two groups were Joel Barlow, John Trumbull, Timothy Dwight, Francis and Joseph Hopkinson, Charles, Jared and Edward Ingersoll, William Meredith, Horace Binny, Richard Rush, the Biddles, Ewings, Sergeants, and Halls. Doctors such as Rush, Caspar Wistar, Benjamin Smith Barton, Philip Syng Physick, Thomas Chalkley Jones, Charles Caldwell and Nathaniel Chapman were anxious to publish their writings, as were clergymen such as William White, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church, James Abercrombie, John

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Flewelling, op. cit., p. 100.

Blair Linn, Samuel B. Wylie, and "Pareon" Weeme, and teachers such as William Smith, Robert Proud, Alexander Wilson, the ornithologist, George Ord, the naturalist, and John Sandsreem. To these men, Dennis appealed in his Prosepectus to the Port Folio, December, 1800:

A new weekly paper,  
to be called  
THE PORT FOLIO  
By Oliver Oldschool, Esq.

Warned by 'the waywardness of the time,' and the admonitions of every honest printer, the Editor begins his work on a Lilliputian page, and, like a saving grocer, gives of his goods only a small sample, but subscribers, if peradventure the Editor should have any, must not 'deepiss the day of small things.' It is proposed always to give plenty of letter-press, in proportion to the public demand, and, as the exigency of the season, or copiousness of materials may require, to double, treble, and even quadruple the pages in the PORT FOLIO. Hereafter, more may be done, if more be wanted, and if more be fostered. At present, with the prudent policy of wary beginners, it is judged expedient to risk but little. No enormous promises are made, and no magnificence of style attempted. The paper is to be neither wire-woven, nor hot-pressed, and it certainly, in more senses than one, shall not be cream-coloured; but in a plain dress of Quaker simplicity, may, perhaps, offer something tolerable on political, literary, and transient topics, and something, auxiliary to sound principles, which after church, 'retired leisure' may read on Sunday.

Empirical vaunting is always nauseous and arrogant; and the plausibility of mighty promise has generally a pitiful conclusion. The Editor, with honest diffidence, declines making specious engagements; timid, lest time or chance, lest laziness, sickness, or stupidity, should step between stipulation and fulfilment, he applies to himself one of the didactics of Solomon, and 'boasts not himself of to-morrow, for he knows not what a day may bring forth.'<sup>1</sup>

Dennis here is taking a cautious attitude, it seems, but in alluding to "the waywardness of the times," which was considered to be America's interest in politics rather than literature, Dennis is subtly attacking the nation's indifference to literature--the same criticism he has had for many years.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellie, Dennis, pp. 138-139.



That he was a "wary beginner" alludes to the idea that Dennie had set as his goal the destroying of the public's complacency by considering literature as a whole, that is, all types of literature rather than one specific type, and by examining American literature, rather than French, Italian, Irish, Spanish, etc. He did, however, criticize the works of the English if they did not meet his expectations. In this way, concentrating on the whole field of literature, but confining it to American works, with a few English writings also, Dennie hoped to raise the standard of literature in America by a comprehensible method. No wonder he was wary, as the few who had attempted to do these things before had not succeeded. Dennie goes on to explain that he would avoid undertaking certain things, such as the publishing of an impartial paper, spreading false rumors about the government, church, or literature of England in an attempt to subvert the government or moral of the country, or engaging in ill-mannered controversy;<sup>1</sup> that is, Dennie was going to present a forthright, but honest paper. He would attempt, on the other hand, to:

relieve the dryness of news, and the severity of political argument, with wholesome morals and gay miscellany--to insert interesting articles of biography, criticism, poetry, and merriment, and 'bind the rod of the moralist with the roses of the muse.' . . . it is the object of this undertaking, to combine literature with politics, and attempt something of a more honorable destiny, than a meagre journal. . . . To accomplish this purpose, the co-operation of many minds is requisite.<sup>2</sup>

In Dennie's call for the co-operation of many minds, he was laying the foundations for the flowering of New England, as in calling for American talent, he was trying to encourage and stimulate a literary atmosphere in which the recognition of good literature could be obtained. He made it quite clear, though, in calling for such talent that he would not tolerate the work

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<sup>1</sup> W. Jacobs' Company, 1906, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, Dennie, p. 139.

of an "obsoure and illiterate individual, of mere mechanical skill."<sup>1</sup> The writer had to be, then, something special--special in skill, in plot, in address, and in speech.

Even though Dennie said that he would "exeroiss great tenderness and lenity towards all who tomtpt the dangerous ocean of ink, (and that) the literary offspring of youthful and trembling authors shall, if possible, be fostered,"<sup>2</sup> he, nevertheless, did not deviate from his high literary standards. Dennie had, as seen previously, always based these standards upon the examples set by Addison, Goldsmith, and Sterne, whom Dennie believed to be the finest in the classical and established style of literature.

Dennie defended his idea of literary excellence through his criticisms of writers. Not once does he directly state what these standards are, but makes them clear through subtlety, detachment, and example. For example, in his criticism of W. L. Bowles, the author of St. Michael's Mount, Dennie says: "His images are rich, and he has a great command of poetic language."<sup>3</sup> Later, in a biography on Bowles, he makes the statement:

The poetry of Mr. Bowles is exquisitely pathetic, and perfectly original. He possesses the power of awakening the finer feelings to a degree of even painful sensibility. Next to pathos, dignified simplicity appears to be the leading feature of his work.<sup>4</sup>

How unconcerned and detached in tone Dennie seems to be here, yet how clearly he states and defends those qualities which he believes can be found in only the best of literature: originality, and the command of language

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<sup>1</sup> Oberholtzer, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Dennie and Asbury Dickens (eds), The Port Folio, 1803, III, p. 277, as quoted by Fwelleling, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Port Folio, 1804, IV, p. 382. Ibid., p. 107.

which is simple and dignified, yet awakens the senses to feel what the author describes.

Dennie further substantiated this standard in his criticism on Byron's poetry: "Many of them (the poems) are written with spirit and force."<sup>1</sup> Here, Dennis subtly stresses vitality, which gives rise to freshness, which in turn points to originality. On Byron, however, Dennis was more concerned with his faulty grammar and versification than anything else, which demonstrates still other standards. "This critic will not read this volume without discovering some faults of versification, and some sin against grammar."<sup>2</sup> Thus, good grammar and correct versification become literary standards for Dennis.

By example, Dennis showed his disgust for lack of originality in his criticisms of Joel Barlow's The Columbiad.

The first thing that strikes the cursory reader is a certain wearisome sameness and dull repetition of favorite phrases and perpetually recurring rhymes. . .

The same barren lack of invention is stamped upon every part of his geographical descriptions. . . indifference, bordering on disgust, creeps upon us. . .

'New York ascend o're Hudson's seaward  
isles,  
And flings the sunbeams from the glittering  
tiles,  
Albania opening thro the distant wood  
Roll her rich treasures o're her parent  
blood.'

With much the same feelings with which we read in Dr. Morse's Gazetteer that 'Weatherfield is a post town in Connecticut five miles southeast from Hartford. . .<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Port Folio, N.S., 1809, I, p. 258. Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Port Folio, N.S., 1809, I, p. 59. Ibid., p. 151.

In the same criticism, Dennie stated another mechanical standard: "We look, but look in vain, for that unity of fable, that regular succession of incident. . .The author has heaped together the immense, discordant mass of characters, facts and descriptions."<sup>1</sup> Here, Dennie points out his standard of a unified and well-developed plot.

If an author met these particular standards, Dennie would not hesitate to lavish praise upon them. Such is the case of his criticism of Edmund Burke, whose style he calls "like old pieces of plate, or old pieces of tapestry; sometimes oddly constructed like the first, and sometimes replete with bizarre figures, like the second, but still very rich and gorgeous."<sup>2</sup> Here, too, Dennie shows his fondness for established patterns in literature as attested to by the word "old."

Probably Dennie's best examples of his standards of simplicity and originality can be found in his criticism of William Wordsworth and Benjamin Franklin: the former was praised, the latter condemned.

Even though Dennie sometimes thought Wordsworth's simplicity had turned into silliness, he generally believed him to be "a genuine poet, who judiciously employs the language of simplicity and nature to express the tones of passion; and who has forsaken the neoromatic realms of German extravagance, and the torrid zone of Della Cruscan ardour."<sup>3</sup> Upon reprinting Wordsworth's poem, "We Are Seven," Dennie remarked that he was led by its simplicity and tenderness,<sup>4</sup> and in a brief note that introduced "Simon Lee," Dennie stated

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> Reprint from the Farmer's Museum and Lay Preacher's Gazette. Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> Port Folio, 1801, p. 408. Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Fwelleling, op. cit., p. 109.



that both poems were "extracted from Lyrical Ballads, a collection remarkable for originality, simplicity, and nature. . .<sup>1</sup> Again, on the Lyrical Ballads, Dennie related that "a majority of critics, as well as readers of taste, have agreed that he has. . .discovered the secret of exhibiting the most pleasing and the most interesting thoughts in the simplest expression."<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note here that Dennie states that a majority of critics praised Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, when in actuality, Dennie's Port Folio was the only one of the American periodicals that gave a favorable criticism, and that recognized the value of the poems upon their first appearance in the United States.<sup>3</sup> This shows, if nothing else, Dennie's good taste and ability to criticize the works of his contemporaries.

In contrast to his praise of Wordsworth, Dennie soundly rapped Franklin's lack of originality. Dennie, I believe, showed courage by daring to attack a man who was looked upon as a sort of a god in Philadelphia, and who, with the possible exception of George Washington or Thomas Jefferson, was made more of in periodicals. But Dennie had no use for his writing, and questioned much of Franklin's originality, saying:

Every miser read his precepts with rapture, and Franklin was pronounced not only wise and good, and patriotic, and all that--but an original writer. Such a strange opinion as the last never could have been entertained, except in a country, from its newness, paucity of literary information, and the imperfection of its systems of education, puzzled to distinguish an original from a copy. For, the fact is, that 'our Benjamin' was no more distinguished for the originality of his conceptions, than for the purity of his life, or the soundness of his religious doctrine. As a writer, he plundered his thoughts and his phrases from others. . .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> "An Author's Evenings," The Port Folio, 1801, I, p. 53. Ibid., p. 144.

In both criticisms, Dennie also asserts that the standard of American literature is far below that of Europe--particularly that of England as seen through the example of Wordsworth.

Another standard of literary excellence which Dennie defended was that of eloquent speech. He believed that Americans spoke vulgarly and colloquially, and destroyed the beauty of the English tongue. Upon hearing about Noah Webster's proposal to publish a dictionary, Dennie humorously in words, but seriously in thought and intent, criticized his attempts to write down such a language as the American language.

It was once proposed by a member of Congress, in the beginning of the Revolution, to abolish, not only the English government, but the English language in the United States, and to substitute the Hebrew in its stead. Mr. Webster, with more propriety, is about to institute a language of his own. . . and to be styled the Father of the American tongue.

As Mr. Webster's Dictionary is intended to be a complete assylum (sic) for fugitive words, no doubt the idiotisms of his countrymen will here find refuge. Thus, her's and your's will be changed into hern and yourn, fetch and catch, into foch and cotch. . .<sup>1</sup>

And again: "The papers have announced that a certain critic. . . is about to publish a Dictionary of the American vulgar tongue. . ."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps Dennie's most important criticism was that on the Romantic and Gothic romances of Mrs. Anne Radcliffe. Although he had praised her in his Port Folio earlier for her ability in delineating character, and the useful moral lessons which she derived from her acquaintance with life, and for "the purity and grace of her language, and her descriptions of natural scenery,"<sup>3</sup> he violently criticized her for her mournful or horrible descriptions. Her

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<sup>1</sup> Port Folio, N.S., 1807, IV, p. 323. Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, Dennie. p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Dennie, "The Lay Preacher's Critique of Mrs. Radcliffe's Romances," The Port Folio, 1803, III, as quoted from F.L. Pattee, Century Readings in American Literature. New York: 1932, pp. 159-163.

foreboding castles, manufactured ghosts, creaking doors, chests full of bones, dead bodies and banditti seemed to Dennie to make for a very ordinary tale--not common in the sense of always being there--but in the sense of lacking in originality, playing mournfully and unduly on sentiment, giving rise to a belief in superstition, and terrifying the mind. Dennie did not believe that this should be the effect of literature, but that it should leave one with eloquent, somewhat moralistic thoughts that would elevate a man's character, rather than frighten it. He used her as an example of that part of the Romantic movement which he did not believe in, although he did consider the appropriate image, and accuracy of description good, but not among the "highest efforts of the mind."

As seen by the above examples, then, Dennie's main literary standards of excellence were: writings based upon English 18th century models such as Addison, Goldsmith, and Sterne; originality, simplicity, correct grammar, a well-developed and unified plot; images that could exalt the senses; eloquence in language; and thought and moral inspiring subjects. These are coupled with earlier mentioned standards of personal experience--that is, an author must have experienced what he is relating in order to give an honest opinion or description; an author had to be mature--that is, his thoughts could not be rent with emotionalism, wild imagination, or child-like fantasy; and an author had to be independent in such a way that he would not be swayed by popular opinion, which to Dennie in most cases, usually meant wrong or poor opinion. These standards sound quite simple, yet Dennie devoted practically his whole life in urging American writers to use them, and the American public to recognize them.

The favorable notices which Dennie accorded to such authors as Washington Irving, William Cowper, Sir Walter Scott, and Charles Brookden Brown supported his standards. Dennie praised Irving's originality, and commented that he thought Irving was "a well-principled Federalist, a wit, and a cavalier."<sup>1</sup> By using the words "Federalist" and "cavalier," Dennie also shows the earlier influences which were now making themselves manifest. Originality was also the keynote of Dennie's praise for Cowper, as was the morality which he thought Cowper employed in his works. For Cowper, Dennie had great respect, as evidenced by his use of a quotation from Cowper on the Port Folio's title page, and by the use of an eloquent biography of Cowper that is found in the first edition. In the biography's forward, Dennie wrote "The ardent genius, the wholesome satire, and the moral aim of the poet, Cowper, have been universally extolled. No modern. . . has more fairly earned, or more fully deserved the high and illustrious title of an original writer."<sup>2</sup> Of Scott, Dennie particularly liked the "great taste" which the latter used in selecting subjects for composition, and called him a "genuine poet (whose) Lay of the Last Minstrel (was) the most beautiful poem that (had) appeared since the day of Goldsmith. . . nothing can be added to Mr. Scott's praise."<sup>3</sup> Dennie praised Brown as a "very ingenious man of letters," a great translator, one of the most respectable booksellers, and an author "whose scrupulous purity of style"<sup>4</sup> made him a credit to American literature.

Perhaps one of the most significant influences which entered into Dennie's criticisms was that of his political beliefs. It seems that Dennie

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis, Dennie, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Port Folio, 1801, I, p. 125. Fwellling, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Port Folio, N.S., 1803, IV, p. 310. Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> Port Folio, 1804, IV, p. 268. Ibid., p. 169.



could seldom keep politics and literature separate; this characteristic was perhaps Dennie's greatest fault. He could not, it seems, find a way to excuse a man's politics if they disagreed with his in lieu of his literary abilities. As exemplified by Dennie's criticisms of Freneau, he was, nevertheless, honest to his readers in that he gave political reasons for the basis of his literary judgment. When Dennie was reviewing Freneau's poetry, he said:

It may not be amiss to mention our regret at the author, in several places, giving us cause to censure him for principles, which, in this country, are rarely in unison with genius. Providence, while she permits the pest of Jacobinism to range at large among us, has kindly shown her in her foulest colours, she displays no elegance of form, no fascination of manners, no persuasion of eloquence, but rude and deformed, is equally disgusting to the spirit of philosophy and to the eye of taste.<sup>1</sup>

As in most cases, though, Dennie would later print a retraction in the guise of a complimentary statement on the value of his victim's literature. This part of Dennie's criticism was perhaps his greatest, as he vividly demonstrates his attempts to give the American public the best in literature that he could find and the most honest opinions he had, in spite of deeply-rooted personal feelings. Again, as seen by a criticism of Freneau:

For the politics of the author it is pretty well known that we have no peculiar partiality, but of the poetry of this versatile bard we must say that, by the impartial, it will be, at length, considered as entitled to no ordinary place in a judicious estimate of American genius.<sup>2</sup>

and by a criticism on Coleridge: "however erroneous in his political creed, (Coleridge) is a man of genius and a poet."<sup>3</sup>

His criticisms of Joel Barlow were retained, however. Dennie's deep hatred for Paine had resulted in his intense dislike for Barlow, for it was

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<sup>1</sup> Port Folio, N.S., IV, pp. 251, 257, 313, 349, passim. Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> Port Folio, 17 October-28 November, 1807. Ellis, Dennie, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Port Folio, 1806. Fwelling, op. cit., p. 117.

the latter who had saved the manuscript of the Age of Reason and saw to its publication for Paine when that individual was imprisoned in France, and who was a staunch consort of Paine's political ideas. Too, Barlow had been urged by Dennie's other arch rival, Thomas Jefferson, to write a history of the United States which resulted in The Columbiad. Dennie's review of this poem raised such a storm of protest from the Port Folio's readers that Dennie was obliged to print the following explanation. At the first reading, it sounds like a complete retraction of his criticism, plus an apology to Barlow. However, upon closer examination, one discovers that it is really a quite subtle statement in that it excuses nothing, and still retains the flavor of the previous Barlow criticism. Dennie, in stating that the criticism had been sent to him by "a very accomplished, and well-principled scholar," said:

As we knew this criticism to be the production of a man of uncommon learning, talents, and genius, as we respect him as a gentleman, a scholar, and a moralist, and, as in our unbiased opinion, we think most of his strictures perfectly correct, we do not hesitate, no, not for a moment, to give the place of honour to his production. This has excited not a little clamour against the Editor, who is again and again rebuked for his fancied prejudice against the Literature of his country.

...The editor most certainly has no prejudices against Mr. Barlow, as a poet, and if at any time, it were in his power, he would confer on him a benefit rather than inflict an injury ...The idea of deliberate hostility to this work, as an American production, is absurd; and we had imagined that a pretty long and labourious series of years, devoted to the encouragement and dissemination of native productions, was an abundant refutation of this obsolete, illiberal, and groundless opinion. The Port Folio most manifestly is, all strictness, a Literary Journal, expressly intended to aggrandize the national character.<sup>1</sup>

Dennie's Port Folio supported his standards perhaps the best by the inclusion of works which he believed to be examples of excellent literature. Letters written by John Quincy Adams, William Pitt, Hume, and Richardson;

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<sup>1</sup> Port Folio, N.S., 1809, I, p. 432. Ibid., p. 152.

addresses by Alexander Hamilton (the credit which Dennie gave to Hamilton was probably based more upon the latter's political accomplishments rather than upon his literary superiority); translations from Horace and other Classic poets, and translations from the French, Spanish, German, and Gaelic; essays and poems by Charles Jared Ingersoll, James Elliot, J.S.J. Gardiner, Tyler, Thomas, Cowper, Leigh Hunt, Irving, Thomas Moore, who was Dennie's staunchest supporter in England, and Sir Walter Scott, all appeared in Dennie's Port Folio.

The years from 1802 to 1805 witnessed the high tide of the popularity of the Port Folio, as its subscription list was higher than that of any other American magazine. Dennie, however, suffered the consequences of its success, for while he had been so ardent in trying to raise the standards of literature, he had lost his own literary career. The editor of such a famous magazine had no time to write a new series of essays or continue with his old. No doubt had he continued with his own literary career, he might today be recognized as a writer and take his place among the great men of American belles-lettres. Dennie, at this time, was not concerned with his own writing, however, for through his editorship, he had achieved that position in society that he had always hoped for, and he thought too, that he was doing his part for American literature by bringing examples of excellent literature before the nation. That he was doing his part, and more, cannot be denied, for as pointed out before, he was creating the literary atmosphere so badly needed to pave the way for the recognition of later American literary greats. He was satisfied in this capacity, was surrounded by amiable, intelligent, and literary-minded friends in the Tuesday Club--a social club which was composed of men chiefly of the legal profession, but who were also interested in the pursuit of

literature. All of the members were college graduates and Federalists. Dennis enjoyed the opportunities for literary discussions, political discussion, and a frequent boisterous social gathering. Its members were said to have included Charles Brookden Brown, Linn, Ingersoll, Horace Binney, Nathaniel Chapman, Samuel Ewing, Joseph Hopkinson, William Meredith, Richard Rush, son of Dr. Benjamin Rush, Thomas Cadwalader, Thomas I. Warton, Richard Peters, Philip Hamilton, Nicholas Biddle, Robert Walsh, Alexander Wilson, and William B. Wood.<sup>1</sup> Of Dennis and his influence on the club, Thomas Moore wrote:

In the society of Mr. Dennis and his friends, . . . I passed the few agreeable moments which my tour through the states afforded me. Mr. Dennis has succeeded in diffusing through his cultivated little circles that love of good literature and sound politics which he feels so zealously himself, and which is so rarely the characteristic of his countrymen.<sup>2</sup>

Besides his close friends in the United States, Dennis had many friends in Europe. These included Moore, Leigh Hunt, Lucas George, a young Irish author, Anne Bannerman, a little-known Scotch poetess, George Brewer, an editor, lawyer, playwright, and essayist in England, William Gifford, and Thomas Campbell, a young English poet; although these friends were not considered great artists nor are they too well-known today, they, nevertheless, were prominent in the literary circles in Dennis's time.

If not known primarily for his literary talents, Dennis was certainly known for his political ideas. Friction between the Federalist and Democratic parties was running at a fever pitch. The Democrats had gained control of Congress and their candidate for President, Thomas Jefferson, had been elected.

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<sup>1</sup> Oberholtzer, op. cit., pp. 176-177.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, Dennis, p. 173.



Dennie, still loyal to his early political beliefs continued to write vicious political essays. However, one in particular was used against him, and resulted in his being tried for seditious libel. The paragraph that so aroused feeling is as follows:

A democracy is scarcely tolerable at any period of national history. Its omens are always sinister, and its powers are unpropitious. With all the lights of experience blazing before our eyes, it is impossible not to discern the futility of this form of government. It was weak and wicked in Athens. It was bad in Sparta and worse in Rome. It has been tried in France, and has terminated in despotism. It was tried in England, and rejected with the utmost loathing and abhorrence. It is on its trial here, and the issue will be civil war, desolation, and anarchy. No wise man but discerns its imperfections, no good man but shudders at its miseries, no honest man but proclaims its fraud, and no brave man but draws his sword against its force. The institution of a scheme of policy, so radically contemptible and vicious, is a memorable example of what the villiany of some men can devise, the folly of others receive, and both establish, in despite of reason, reflection and sensation.<sup>1</sup>

For this burst of independency that had been nurtured and stimulated since he was a small boy, Dennie, ironically on the Fourth of July, 1803, was indicted for seditious libel. However, there was no action until 1805, at which time, Dennie was found not guilty by a unanimous verdict.

In 1804, Dennie announced in the Port Folio the proposal of a forthcoming "first complete edition in America" of the works of William Shakespeare. He called for a long list of Shakespeare's works, but the reply was not good, and Dennie dropped this plan in 1807.

During the years of 1806 and 1808, the Port Folio declined in popularity. Dennis had been in ill health, and had not contributed as much energy to it as he had previously; many of its best contributors had left for various reasons, and as a result, Dennie had to rely more and more upon the English

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

writer's works than upon the American works he had once published. It seemed to him that his efforts had done little, if no good, in procuring good and continuous literature from American writers. Too, Dennie began to rely more upon the English standards of spelling; such words as those ending in -our were not infrequent within his editorials, nor were ridicouling statements about American spellings and expressions. Although Dennie seemed to be fervent in his zeal for things British--much more so than ever before--it is interesting to note part of his reaction to the impressment of American sailors by British seamen in 1807. This reaction, I believe, shows further evidence of Dennie's high moral standard, for no matter whom or what--friend or country--Dennie might favor, he was always willing to criticize when he thought their principles wrong. It also shows that Dennie was not completely anti-American--that he realized that the United States did offer some values and that as an American, he would support his country when it was confronted by an unjust circumstance. He very subtly points out, however, that he expects this country to uphold the high standards with which he credits her.

The conductor of this Journal is in possession of no graduated scale, by which he can ascertain with mathematical preciseness the exact difference between the patriotism of one American and another; for, like our correspondent, the Editor is an American; he educated himself in America; he lives in America, and as he does not contemplate a change in his situation, the probability is that he will die in America. He has some stake in the country. His family friends, literary friends, social friends and party friends, are American. To America alone he looks for that ordinary measure of encouragement due to pretensions humble like his own; and for a magnanimous America, a well-governed America, a noble, loyal, generous, gallant, high-spirited America, he feels an affection more intensely warm than all the flickering flames of the patriotism either in Junius Brutus, or John Hampden, or John Pym or Algernon Sidney.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Port Folio, 24 January, 1807. Ibid., p. 196.

This sounds like a tired man--tired of the criticisms against his political views, tired of the criticisms against him for his literary views--and tired most of all as a result of feeling that his life has been a waste. He had gained neither the great literary reputation that he desired, nor the amount of wealth that he had dreamed of, nor were either of his goals in life fulfilled. This also sounds like a mellowed Dennie, but a Dennie still true to his principles of honesty and independence.

The Port Folio went out of his management sometime in 1809. He remained, however, as the editor of the magazine that he had founded and had nursed to prosperity, and now was watching its gradual decline. He, too, like his "child" was declining in health. From his early childhood, he had never been a healthy person, but had always managed to keep his spirits high when his health was not. He still retained this strength of spirit, as in the latter part of 1809, he issued a prospectus announcing the new form of the Port Folio, which was to be conducted by Oliver Oldschool, "assisted by a 'Confederacy of Men of Letters.'" This was to be a revitalized edition, and for a while the Port Folio's change brought back some of the prosperity it had known not too long before. The significant thing, however, is that Dennie was to be assisted by a group of men--chief among whom was Nicholas Biddle, who guided by Dennie in the preceding years became the Port Folio in early 1812. During that year, Dennie had contacted an almost fatal disease, but had rallied enough to put out the January issue of the magazine. Shortly after that, however, he suffered a relapse, and on the seventh of that month died. He was buried in St. Peter's churchyard in Philadelphia, and several years later, a monument supposedly written by his friend, John Quincy Adams, was erected over his grave. The inscription is aptly phrased, and is an honest, lasting

memorial to the man who wanted to be "great."

# JOSEPH DENNIE

Born at Lexington, In Massachusetts,  
 August 30, 1768  
 Died at Philadelphia, January 7th, 1812  
 Endowed with talents, and qualified  
 By Education  
 To adorn the Senate,<sup>1</sup> and the Bar,  
 But following the impulse of a Genius,  
 Formed for Converse with the Muses,  
 He devoted his life to the Literature of his Country.

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As author of the Lay Preacher  
 And as first editor of the Port Folio  
 He contributed to chasten the morals, and to refine  
 the taste of the nation.  
 To an imagination, lively, not licentious,  
 A wit sportive, not wanton,  
 And a heart without guile,  
 He united a deep sensibility, which  
 Endear'd him to his  
 Friends, and an ardent piety, which we humbly trust  
 Recommended him to his God:  
 Those friends have erected this tribute  
 To his Memory,  
 To the Mercies of that God is their resort  
 For themselves, and for Him.  
 MDCCCXIX <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennie was asked to read the convocation.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, Dennie, Appendix F, p. 245.



## CONCLUSION

Before his physical death, Dennie also experienced another death--the death of his dreams and goals in life. He believed that he had not fulfilled his purpose of destroying the American public's complacency toward mediocre literature, nor had he instilled within the American author the desire and the means by which excellent literature could be written. The despair that resulted from these beliefs was immense as evidenced by a passage from one of his last Lay Preacher essays.

Such a splenetic author as the Lay Preacher, for instance, restless, and whose labors are in regular rotation, moves through the ruts of life, creaking and complaining of obstruction in the way, and when the daily drudgery is done, is left, by the inattention of mankind, without a shelter, or sunk into a slough.<sup>1</sup>

How wrong Dennie was, as he had succeeded through his criticisms and through his standards of literary excellence in establishing the force necessary for awakening literary-conscious persons from their lethargy. In his Port Folio, Dennie had given them a level of literary excellence yet to be attained in America, but had shown them the means by which to obtain it. Through this only literary magazine which had a national circulation and patronage, Dennie had conveyed a sincere and honest love of literature to many who had deemed it commonplace or unimportant in the citizens' lives who were giving their efforts to the making of an independent nation in politics rather than the arts. Also, through the Port Folio, Dennie had set such high literary standards that its editor, fifteen years later, closed the magazine as he thought it no longer lived up to these standards. Most of all, through his untiring efforts to produce good literature, Dennie had influenced such

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<sup>1</sup> Dennie, The Lay Preacher, XXIII, Hall (ed), p. 51.

writers as Irving, Daniel Webster, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Irving's pseudonym, Jonathan Oldstyle is highly suggestive of Dennie's own Oliver Oldschool, Esq., and it is not unreasonable to suppose that through the contagion of Dennie's influence, Irving's Salmagundi papers in 1807 had been modelled after the Port Folio, as it was in its prime, and Dennie's fame as "a writer of light, satirical essays was uncontested."<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Webster once asserted that Dennie's criticism helped him more than anything else, as Dennie had once declared that they "were full of emptiness and it did me good."<sup>2</sup> Too, Nathaniel Hawthorne was affected by Dennie's influence, as he once esteemed Dennie as the finest writer in America.<sup>3</sup> Dennis, by being the first American critic to recognize the talents of Wordsworth, and by giving his, Leigh Hunt's, Thomas Moore's, and Thomas Campbell's contributions ample credit, opened not only their literary doors, but also the doors of young, aspiring American authors, who, by reading the former's works gained confidence in themselves, and although they never became great, nevertheless, tried to improve in some way the nation's literature. Dennie, then, helped make a nation more aware of good literary standards through his Port Folio, and through his Lay Preacher series--a feat which few could have accomplished. For this one thing alone, Dennie should be remembered as a prominent figure in American literature. That he was the "Father of American Belles-lettres" and a defender of literary excellence cannot be denied. He was a man who lived by standards, and who gave those standards to a nation in order that it might be a greater country in both personal aims and literary values.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis, Dennie, p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 111.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

THE LAY PREACHER  
XXXVIII

## "Great is Diana of the Ephesians"

The usual exclamation of prejudice, ignorance, or enthusiasm in every age.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the occasion of this phrase is pleasantly recorded. St. Paul and his colleagues, perceiving the absurdities of the pagan system, ventured to expose the futility of the heathen worship and to point out a better way to the heavenly country. But the manufacturers of idols, terribly alarmed at an innovation which would probably abridge, if not destroy, the profits of their trade, immediately convened, though not to deliberate but to dogmatize. For instead of reasoning coolly upon the subject, and attempting to prove to the populace the celestial origin of their goddess and the active concern she too, in the affairs of mortals, they gave a loose to their passions, became full of wrath, and bawled out that Diana was great, without once showing why. Of all that hot-headed multitude, perhaps not an individual had geography enough to ascertain the site of Ephesus, or history enough to inform him of the adventures or exploits of Diana. Craftsmen had told the ignorant crowd a pompous tale, to allure them to the silver shrines, and they believed without examination.

I heartily wish that this cry of enthusiasm had ceased with the superstition of the ancients. But noises of this nature still tingle in our ears, and a town clerk, at the present day, like his temperate predecessor at Ephesus, could not walk in the market place out of hearing of "Great is Diana" or some other sound equally as ridiculous.

Whether it proceeds from the warm climate in which they live, or the brisk champagne they drink, I know not, but the French are singularly prone to momentary fits of enthusiasm, almost bordering on convulsions. They are a very voluble and clamorous race, and if they take it into their heads to like Diana they will swear, not without gestures, that she is great, though all others affirm she is little. Montesquieu might reason, or Rousseau might barangue, but the French would not hear if those sanguinary craftsmen, Marat and Robespierre should summon them to the Convention or the Champ de Mars to assassinate a king or to destroy a government. Trifles like these would be 'light as air' to a Frenchman if an insidious desperado bawled in his ears the greatness and the glory of liberty and equal rights. One unlucky day they set up a certain scowling image, denominated, in their pretty and liquid language, the Guillo-tine. This, to be sure, had a shrine rather of steel than silver, and bowed heads rather than bended knees were the modes of adoration. Those unlucky subjects who, during a life of loyalty, had been much in the habit of crying "Great is the King!" were soon offered up as a Jewish sacrifice, for times were changed and they should have said: "Great is 'the Mountain!'"

A degree conferred by a college is a Diana whose divinity many a dunce has acknowledged. College honors, as they are termed by the craftsman, often operate like amulets and charms, and protect a podent from the warfare of wit and ridicule. They are a species of salt which has saved many a weak and decaying brain from putrefaction. Not a graduate from Cambridge but vaunts of his Alma Mater and cries, "How prescient, how witty, and how wise in the University!" A sceptic might doubt the greatness of this our learned Diana.

Its forkknowledge consists in predicting invisible eclipses of the moon, its wit lies at the bottom of a syllogism, and its wisdom watches the weathercocks and compiles a bill of mortality!

Some have thought that the Cambridge-Diana did not deserve to be worshipped by the learned world. I was once asked by an inquisitive foreigner, in what alcove of our University were deposited its own works. 'It is agreed,' says he, 'that a College is designed to read and write in. Doubtless many of your professors were poets; among your tutors I expect to hear of a Cicero, and the invention of so elevated a character as a President must certainly have produced a folio in every science.' My unbounded affection for the college where I had the honor to pay some three or four hundred pounds for instruction in the first elements of—nothing; my tenderness for the character of instructors of the most bland and accommodating humour; and my zeal for the literary renown of the most fashionable seminary in my country, urged my silence to this query of the stranger concerning a subject so delicate. Dear and learned Sir, I replied, the works of the University are not confined within the narrow precincts of an alcove. The works of the University, Sir, are seen, are seen—on Commencement days. They are diffused throughout—I wish I knew where, except in the form of stewards' bills, I muttered to myself. The gentleman, perceiving my hesitation and being a man of great curiosity and anxious to hear me quote brilliant couplets from some University laureat, or whole orations of some eloquent tutor, now insisted upon a categorical answer. I therefore, in a suppressed voice broken by my many sobs, the tears running down my cheeks, and with a world of apologies, was compelled to reveal to him the nakedness of literature at Cambridge. To his astonishment, and to my sorrow, I narrated facts, 'pitiful, wondrous pitiful,' like Othello's sufferings. I informed him that the tutors, far from being eloquent like the orators of antiquity, were in general such raw boys that they were obliged to spell out even the stated prayer from the confused breviary of evening recollection. That the elaborate trifling of one professor was protracted in his divinity chair, would insult his hearers with the silly miracles of Polycarp, and in his public exercises purloin from Leland the materials of a funeral eulogy. That philosophy was peddled out by the pennyworth, and the streams of learning, instead of being cheaply and easily conducted to each student, were sold, in their muddiest state, for a higher price than mineral water. That I never heard that any of the College Principals were ever poets or painters, or produced any work more meritorious than a Greek Grammar. That some were of such dubious taste as to reject from the College Library the works of Sterne and Swift, and to commence, at the age of fifty, the study of the British Poets as a task reading! I informed my friend that the best and brightest scholars, from Dr. Mayhew to the present time, were generally ignominiously punished for no other crime than that of volatality. I added that if any incorrigible dunce wished to hide his length of ear by a square hat academical, if dray-horses sought a shelter or the King of Spain's fourfooted and braying subjects a dormitory, I could easily mark the place. But for a youth of lively parts and sanguine temperament, place him between the upper and nether mill-stone rather than on his knees before the leaden shrine of our Great Diana of Literature.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Donnie, The Lay Preacher. Ellis (ed), pp. 87-89.



## APPENDIX B

## PANECEYRICK ON THOMSON 1

Come, youthful muse, who, erst in cloister drear,  
 Didst chime, adventurous, thy poetick bells  
 In jingling lays no longer vainly strive,  
 With brother bards, the laurel mead to gain.  
 Thinke be the task, in rhyme-unfetter's verse,  
 To hail the master of the rural song,  
 And sing the beauties of a Thomson's page.

To thee with reverence bends the raptur's muse,  
 Thee to extol loud chaunts her awkward strain,  
 The strain tho' dissonant, sublime the theme  
 And copious, if she sing a Thomson's praise.

Nature, indulgent to a thoughtless world,  
 Had long display'd the wonders of her hand:  
 While busy man, in low pursuits involv'd,  
 Or in the crowded city breathing smoke,  
 Or else reclining on the silken couch  
 Of luxury, foe to nature's simple charms,  
 With eye averted scarcely deign'd to view  
 The scenes enchanting, which her pencil form'd.

The indignant goddess call'd her favourite son,  
 To him her pencil, and her landscape gave,  
 And bade him paint anew the sylvan scene.  
 The bard obey'd; with softened tints retouch'd,  
 Great Nature's work, and, when the goddess view'd,  
 She deeply blush'd, and own'd herself outdone.

The grateful seasons, in their annual round,  
 With ardour emulous gifts conferr'd on thee.  
 First blooming Spring crop'd from the verdant mead  
 A Chaplet gay, thy temples to entwine,  
 And ardent Summer, at meridian hour,  
 When Eheus rag'd, and Zephyr ceas'd to breathe,  
 Yielded the oak umbrageous where reclin'd.  
 You held high converse with the sylvan gods.  
 Mild Autumn, sedulous, rang'd Romona's grove,  
 And pluck'd the ripest fruits to deck thy board.  
Winter came last, high pil'd the blazing hearth,  
 Festrain'd his winds, and gave the studious hour.

At early dawn, the evanescent forms  
 Of pensive Dryads breathe in fancy's ear,  
 This plausible strain, in memory of their bard,

1 From the Massachusetts Magazine, February, 1769, as quoted by Ellis, Dennie.  
 Appendix A, pp. 236-237.

'While artful anglers lure their funny prey,  
'While fervent youths bathe in the lucid stream,  
'While jocund shepherds whet their sounding shears,  
'Around the shepherd's cot while Boreas howls,  
'And brumal snows pooress (sic) the leafless bough  
'So long shall Thomson's wood notes charm the ear,  
'So long his moral page improve the heart.'

(Signed) ACADEMICUS

## APPENDIX C

## THE FARRAGO NO. 1

Quicquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira, voluptas,  
Gaudia, discursus, nostri est farrago libelli.

Juvenal.

## Imitated.

Manners and dress and newest fashions,  
Books, characters, and human passions;

Men acting well, or who astray go  
Ingredients form for the Farrago.

—Anon.

To a lover of abstruse science, desultory essays may appear a minor species of literature. Accustomed to the regularity of system, the sprightliness of an essay he may pronounce impertinence, and its brevity abruptness. But the majority of mankind are not scholars, yet, though ignorant of science, they love instruction and seek it by the most obvious methods. Conscious that their taste is not sufficiently refined to relinquish the more exquisite viands, they content themselves with the simplest dishes of the literary banquet. Hence the currency of Essays. Of that host of readers, whose morals have been meliorated and whose intellects have been illumined by the efforts of genius, few have perused and still fewer have understood the abstract reasonings of Locke and Bacon. Nor is this assertion intended to depreciate the reputation of those valuable authors. Every votary of candor must allow that for the ingenuity and truth of their systems they deserve well of the literary republic. But, since their theories require the undissipated attention even of the professed man of letters, it is obvious to remark that to the busy, the indolent, and lower orders in the community, the labors of speculation can yield little emolument. Accordingly those who exclaim the words of Armstrong,

Peace to each drowsy metaphysic sage  
And ever may all heavy systems rest.

have been allured to the temples of wisdom and virtue by the suavity of Addison, the sprightliness of Steele and the sublime morality of Johnson and Hawkesworth.

Impatience of labor is the characteristic of the dissipated and the volatile. To them systems are useless, because they demand an intenseness of application, which indolence is unwilling to bestow. But to neglect the mental improvement of so numerous a class and suffer them to rove on through the mazes of vice and error without affording a clue to guide them through the labyrinth, were cruel and culpable negligence. Some work must therefore be projected to fix volatility and rouse indolence, neither too abstruse for the young, too prolix for the busy nor too grave for the fair. A performance, which should not resemble an austere monitor, who punishes while he chides, but a pleasant friend, whose conversation at once beguiles and improves the hour. The design was at length accomplished. Certain geniuses of the first magnitude arose, who, in the narrow compass of a sheet of paper, conveyed more useful knowledge to mankind than all the ponderous tomes of Aristotle. Of these ingenious writers Addison stands in the front rank. His Spectators

contributed not a little to refine the taste and morals of his countrymen. Touched by the magic of his ridicule, the coxcomb grew ashamed of his frivolity and the libertine of his vices, the fair laid aside their paints and the hypocrite his mask. Even the Gamester, a character almost incorrigible, whom neither past losses nor future prospects can deter from dice and cards, was awed into honesty. The theist was laughed out of his irreligion and the sceptic resolved to doubt no more. The popularity of this novel species of literary entertainment was evinced by the reception it received. Thousands, who suffered dreary systems to moulder on the shelf, wore out the pages of the Spectator and the Guardian. All ranks experienced the sweetest satisfaction in dedicating their leisure moments to the speculations of Addison. From this variegated parterre they culled the fairest flowers; from this lowly station at the bottom of Parnassus they obtained many a glimpse of the higher region.

It is common observation that mothers and authors are fond of their offspring. Although the Essayist is sensible that his partiality for that literary walk in which he himself proposes to ramble, may discover beauties in it, which appear dim to optics contemplating them through another medium, yet he cannot withhold that warmth of panegyric, which he thinks is due. This enthusiastic fondness the public will pardon, and will suffer the author to swell a little longer upon the praises of the Essay, which merits further encomium for its conciseness, sprightliness and variety. From its size incapable of admitting widely expanded ideas, it exhibits in a page those useful truths for which the plodding students might toil through a volume. That condensation of thought, which Shenstone admired in Pope, and pronounced his chief beauty, in the succinct essay is everywhere prominent. Renouncing the sullen pomp of wisdom, it affects a vivacity, a gaiety, and an airiness peculiarly charming. This cheerful aspect may allure even the prodigal of moments; and though the essay may at first be read to waste time, it may at length contribute to its improvement. Every one from his own experience is sensible that even a hint may awaken the latent spark of wisdom and virtue. Hence, the random reader, who glances over the page for diversion may gain knowledge; as the ancient libertine, who went to deride the philosopher, was won by his persuasion and became a member of his sect.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis, Dennie, pp. 228-230.



## APPENDIX D

## THE PARTAGO NO. III

'Full Many a Frank  
He played, and Tricks Most Fanciful and Strange.  
—Massinger.

Men of tenacious memory, who retain information a week old, may recollect, in my last number, a portrait of Meander.

'A man so various, that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome;  
Who, in the course of one revolving moon,  
Was poet, painter, lover, and buffoon;  
Then all for wenching, gambling, rhyming, frinking,  
Besides ten thousand freaks, that dy'd in thinking.

Agreeably to a promissory note, given in a preceding essay, I now publish, from the diary of this fantastic wight, a selection, which, if judiciously improved, may sober giddy genius, may fix the volatile, and stimulate even loungers.

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Meander's Journal

April 1, Monday.—Having lately quaffed plenteous drafts of the stream of siddipation, I determine to bridle my fancy, to practice self-denial, to live soberly, and to study with ardour. That I may, with ease, discharge the various duties of the day, I propose, that 'Strutting Chanticleer,' and myself, should unroost at the same hour. With this resolve, I couple a determination, to study law with plodding diligence, and to make my profession, and a course of history, my capital objects.

Memorandum. Belles lettres must be considered a subaltern pursuit. If I rise at the dawn, and study jurisprudence till noon, I shall have the satisfaction to reflect, that I have discharged my legal duty for the day. This course, duly persisted in, will probably make me something more than a Tyro, in the language of the law. If I pore over my folios with the diligence I propose, I shall acquire, in Blackstone's phrase, such a legal apprehension, that the obscurities which at present confound me, will vanish, and my journey through the wilderness of law will, peradventure, become delectable.

Tuesday.—Overslept myself, did not rise till nine. Dressed, and went out, intending to go to the office; but, as the morning was uncommonly beautiful, I recollected an aphorism of Dr. Cheyne's, that exercise should form part of a student's religion. Accordingly, I rambled through the woods for two hours. The magic of rural scenes diverted Fancy, whom, on my return to the office, I vined to retire, that he elder sister, Judgment, might have an opportunity to hold a conference with the sage Blackstone's; but, the sportive slutt remained, dancing about, and I found my spirits so agitated, that to calm them, I took up a volume of plays, and read two acts in Centlivre's Busy Body.

Afternoon, 2 o'clock.—Took (sic) up a folio, and began to read a British statute; meanwhile, I received a billet, importing that a couple of my college

crones were at a neighboring inn, who wished me to make one of a select party. I complied. The sacrifices to Mercury and Bacchus were away the night, and it was day before I retired to the land of drowsyhead, as Thomson quaintly expresses it.

Wednesday.—Rose at ten; sauntered to the office, and gaped over my book. Low spirits and a dull morning had raised such a fog around my brain, that I could hardly discern a sentiment. Opened a 'dissertation on memory,' read till my own failed. I then threw away my book, and threw myself on the bed; I can't tell how long I remained there, but, somebody shaking me by the shoulder, I opened my eyes and saw—the maid, who came to inform me that it was eight o'clock in the evening, and that coffee was ready.

Thursday.—Went out at seven, with a determination to attend to business; thought I might venture to call at a friend's house; on my entrance saw a brace of beauties, whose smiles were so animating that they detained me, 'charmed by witchery of eyes,' till noon. I returned to my lodgings, and finding my spirits too sublimated for serious study, I beguiled the remainder of the afternoon, by writing a sonnet to Laura.

Evening.—Lounged to my book-shelf, with an intent to open Blackstone, but made a mistake, and took down a volume of Hume's History of England. Attention became quite engrossed by his narrative of the reign of Henry I. A versatile, brilliant genius, who blended in one bright assemblage ambition, prudence, eloquence and enterprise; who received and merited, what I think the most glorious of all titles, that of Beauclerc, or the polite scholar. The formidable folios, which stood before me, seemed frowningly to ask why I did not link to my ambition, that prudence which formed part of Henry's fame? The remorseful blush of a moment tinged my cheek, and I boldly grasped a reporter; but, straightway recollecting that I had recently supped, and that, after a full meal, application was pernicious to health, I adjourned the cause, Prudence versus Meander, till morning.

Friday.—Rose at the dawn, which is the first time I have complied with my resolution, of unroosting with the cock. 'Projecting many things, but accomplishing none,' is the motto to my coat of arms. Began my studies, noting with nice care the curious distinction in law, between general and special Tail; at length, I grew weary of my task, and thought, with Shakespeare's Horatio, that 'twere considering too curiously, to consider thus. Began to chat with my companions; we are, when indolent, ever advocates for relaxation, but, whether an attorney's office is the place where idling should be tolerated, is a question which I do not wish to determine in the negative. Finished my morning studies with Hafen Slavkenbergius's tenth decade.

Afternoon.—Did nothing very busily till four. Seized with a lethargic yawn, which lasted till seven, when a dish of coffee restored animation, and on the entrance of a friend, fell into general conversation; made a transition to the scenes of our boyish days, and till midnight, employed memory conjuring up to view the shades of our departed joys.

Saturday.—Slept but little, last night. My imagination was so busy in castle-building that she would not repose. Dreamed that Lord Coke threw his 'Institute' at me. Rose at nine, looked abroad; and the atmosphere being dusky, and my spirits absent on furlough, felt unqualified for reading. For several days there has been a succession of gloomy skies. The best writers affirm such weather is unfriendly to mental labour. The poet says,

'While these dull fogs invade the head,  
Memory minds not what is read.'

Took up a magazine, which I carefully skimmed, but obtained no cream. Cracked, in the Dean of St. Patrick's phrase, a rotten nut, which cost me a tooth, and repaid me with nothing but a worm. Breakfasted; reflected on the occurrences of the week. In the drama of my life, Procrastination and Indolence languish. I must strive to check the irregular sallies of fancy. I never shall be useful to others, till I have a better command of myself. Surely one, abiding in the bowers of ease, may improve, if industry be not wanting. Alfred could read and write eight hours every day, though he fought fifty-six pitched battles, and rescued a kingdom; and Chatterton, the ill-fated boyish bard, composed, though cramped by penury, poems of more invention than many a work which has been kept nine years, and published at a period of the ripest maturity. When I fly from business, let ambition, therefore, think on, and practise these things. I determine, next week, to effect an entire revolution in my conduct, to form a new plan of study, and to adhere to it with pertinacity. As this week is on the eve of expiration, it would be superfluous to sit down to serious business. I therefore amused myself, by dipping into Alvenside's 'Pleasures of Imagination'; read till five, visited a friend, and conversed with him, till midnight; conversation turned on propriety of conduct, for which I was a strenuous advocate. \*\*\*

Here, the journal of Meander was abruptly closed. I was curious to learn, in what manner he employed his week of information. On the ensuing Monday, he grew weary of his books; instead of mounting Pegasus, he actually strode a hackhorse, of mere mortal mould, and, in quest of diversion, commenced a journey. He was accompanied, not by the muses, but by a party of jocular travellers; and prior to my friend's departure, the last words he was heard to say, or rather roar, were the burden of a well known anacreontic, 'Dull thinking will make a man crazy.'

The character and journal of Meander, scarcely need a commentary. There shall be none. I was not born in Holland, and only Dutchmen are qualified to write notes. But I will make an apostrophe.

O ye tribe of Macurialists! in the name of prudence, avoid eccentricity; expand not your fluttering pinions; trudge the footway path of life; dethrone Fancy, and crown Common Sense. Let each one seek and fulfil his daily task; 'one to his farm, and another to his merchandize.'

<sup>1</sup> Ellis, Demie, pp. 229-232.

JOSEPH DENNIE--DEFENDER OF LITERARY EXCELLENCE

by

MARILYN McCREADY PETTIT

B. S., Kansas State University, 1957

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF AGRICULTURE AND APPLIED SCIENCE

1959



The purpose of this thesis is two-fold. The primary purpose was the analysis of events, influences, and experiences in Joseph Dennie's life with a view to discerning the effects which they had upon his criticisms of 18th century American literature. The second purpose was to show through examples of Dennie's critical works the standards which he believed necessary for excellent literature and how he defended these standards as an author, editor, and critic.

The procedure used was that of a biography in which Dennie's life was divided into three main periods. The first period included a) family background, b) the Revolution, c) early education, and d) his years as a student at Harvard. The second period points up the events and influences which Dennie experienced as a) a law student, b) an author of the Farrago essays, c) a lay reader, and d) a lawyer. The third period, in which all the past experiences of his life were fused together, includes a discussion of a) The Tablet, b) the Lay Preacher essays, c) his editorship of the Cazette of the United States and the Farmer's Weekly Museum, d) his role in American politics, and e) his influence as editor of the Port Folio.

The conclusions reached are:

1. Dennie's family background was the primary basis for his pursuit of a literary career, his aristocratic attitudes, and his Loyalist political viewpoints.
2. The Revolution helped shape Dennie's political views toward the precepts of democracy, equality, and republicanism. These viewpoints, in turn, affected his critical analyses of such men as Joel Barlow, Coleridge, Thomas Paine, and Timothy Dwight.
3. His early education which was provided for him by his parents and Dame Roger's "dame school," gave him the opportunities to examine Classical

literature, the prominent 18th century English authors such as Goldsmith, Addison, and Sterne, and a variety of literary forms. These opportunities shaped his strong, favorable attitudes towards 18th century English style, and the Classical literary forms which, in later years, became two of his principal literary standards. His early education also included lessons in honesty and industry, which combined with a later sense of independence, became his primary standards for personal character.

4. Harvard University offered to him the opportunity to further his education—both literary and political. It also made it possible for him to acquaint himself with men who would later aid Dennie in his literary ventures or contribute to his Port Folio. Three friendships were of special importance: Reverend Samuel West, Roger Vose, and Timothy Bigelow. West strengthened Dennie's ideas concerning English literature and way of life, religious beliefs, and politics; Vose enabled Dennie to test his literary credos, to further his writing abilities, and to pursue his interest in Classical literature; and Bigelow served as an example to Dennie of a gentleman and a man of learning.

5. As a law student, a lawyer, and a lay reader, Dennie gained ideas for later subjects for his Lay Preacher essays and Port Folio. Too, as a law student, Dennie could more closely examine his political views; as a lawyer, he could practice his persuasive style of writing and speaking upon varied audiences, he could strengthen his personal ideas about honesty and industry, and he could move in the type of society which he thought the best available—a society made up of educated gentleman. As a lay reader, Dennie matured and broadened his concepts concerning his place in life.

6. As the author of the Farrago essays, Dennie was able to make a reputation for himself as a young literary talent. This later helped him

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